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(54) **METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR REWARDING MULTIPLE GAME PLAYERS FOR A SINGLE WIN**

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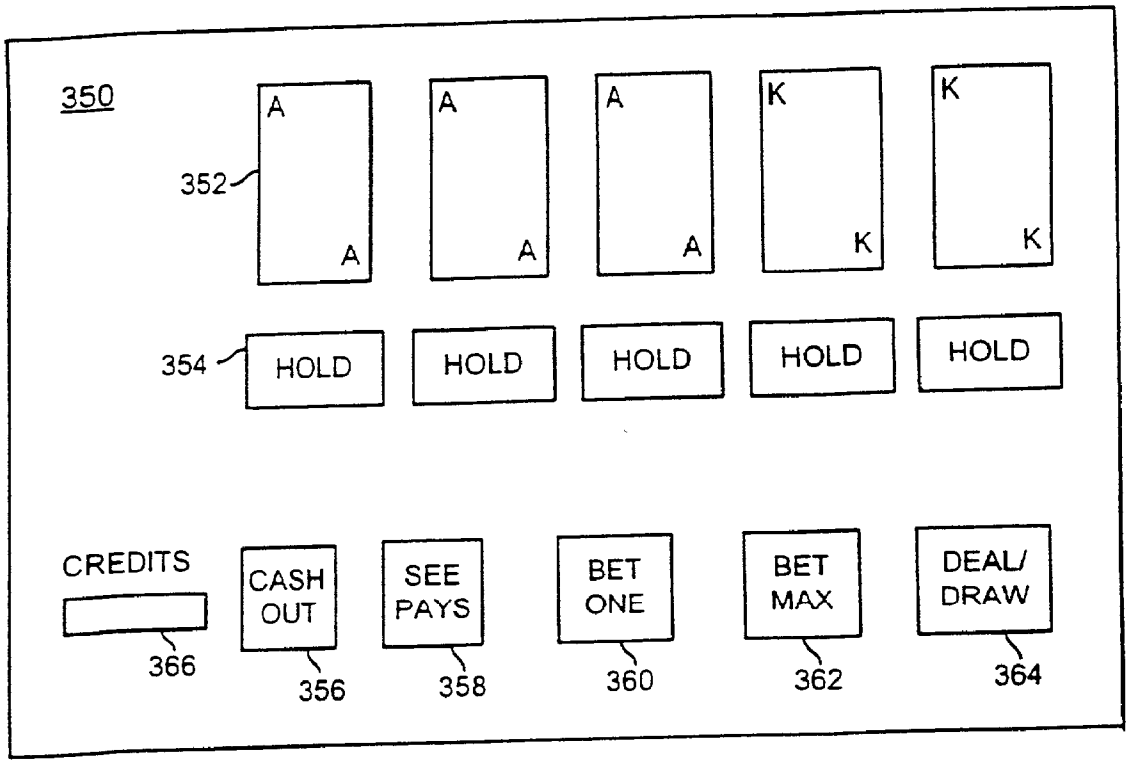
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A gaming apparatus and method is provided that is capable of rewarding a distributed jackpot to players using gaming units that are electronically linked to one another. The distributed jackpot may be shared among non-winning players when a winning result is achieved by a winning player.



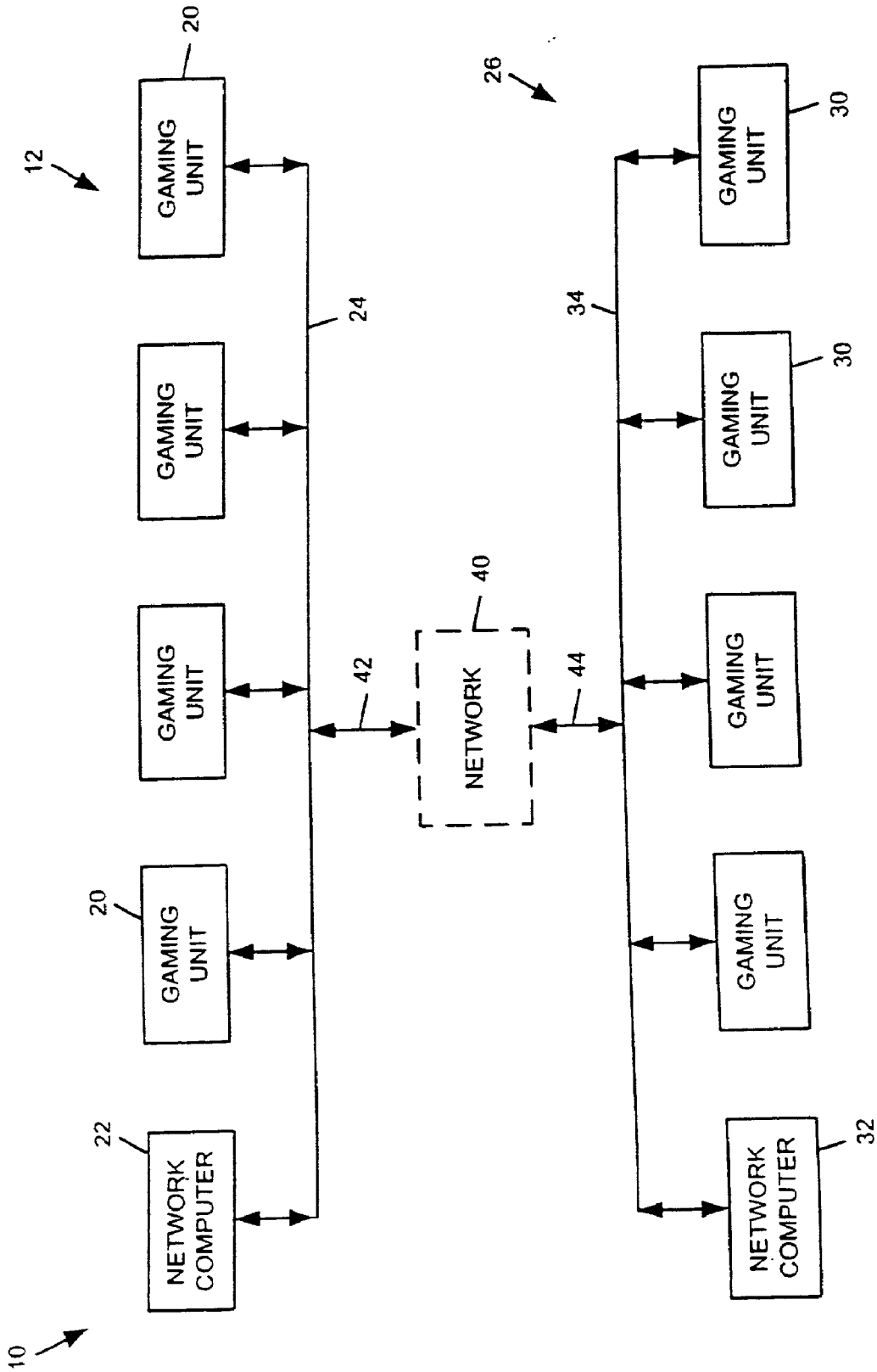

10
12
20
GAMING UNIT
22
NETWORK COMPUTER
24
26
30
32
34
40
NETWORK
42
44

FIG. 1

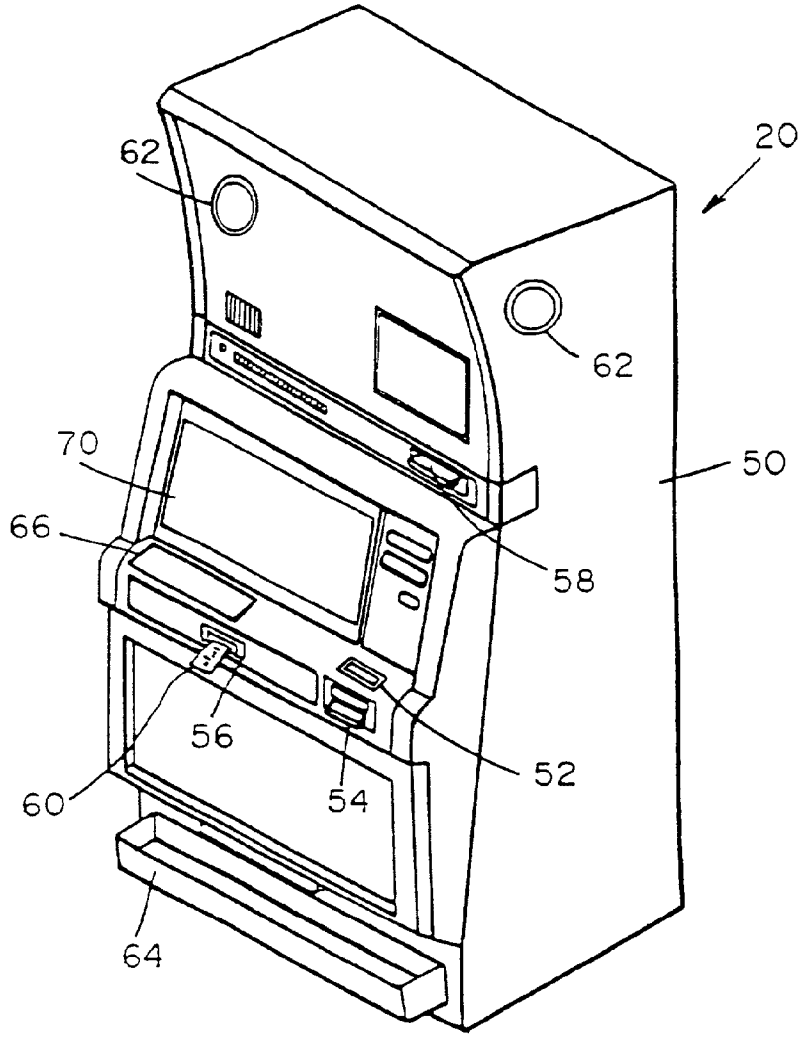

62
20
62
70
50
66
58
56
52
60
54
64

FIG. 2

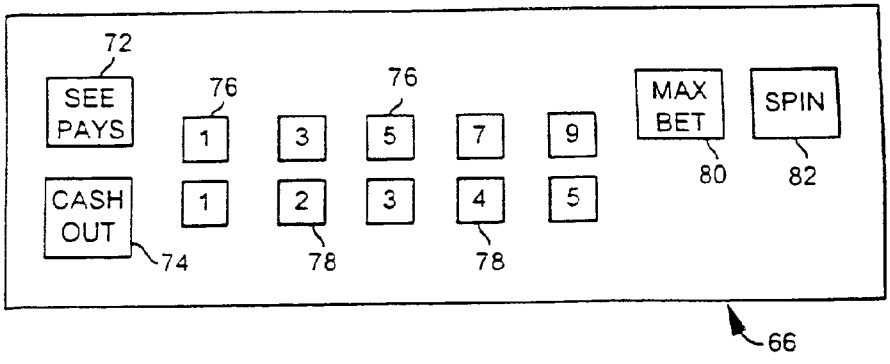

72
SEE PAYS
76
1
3
76
5
7
9
MAX BET
SPIN
80
82
CASH OUT
1
2
3
4
5
74
78
78
66

FIG. 2A

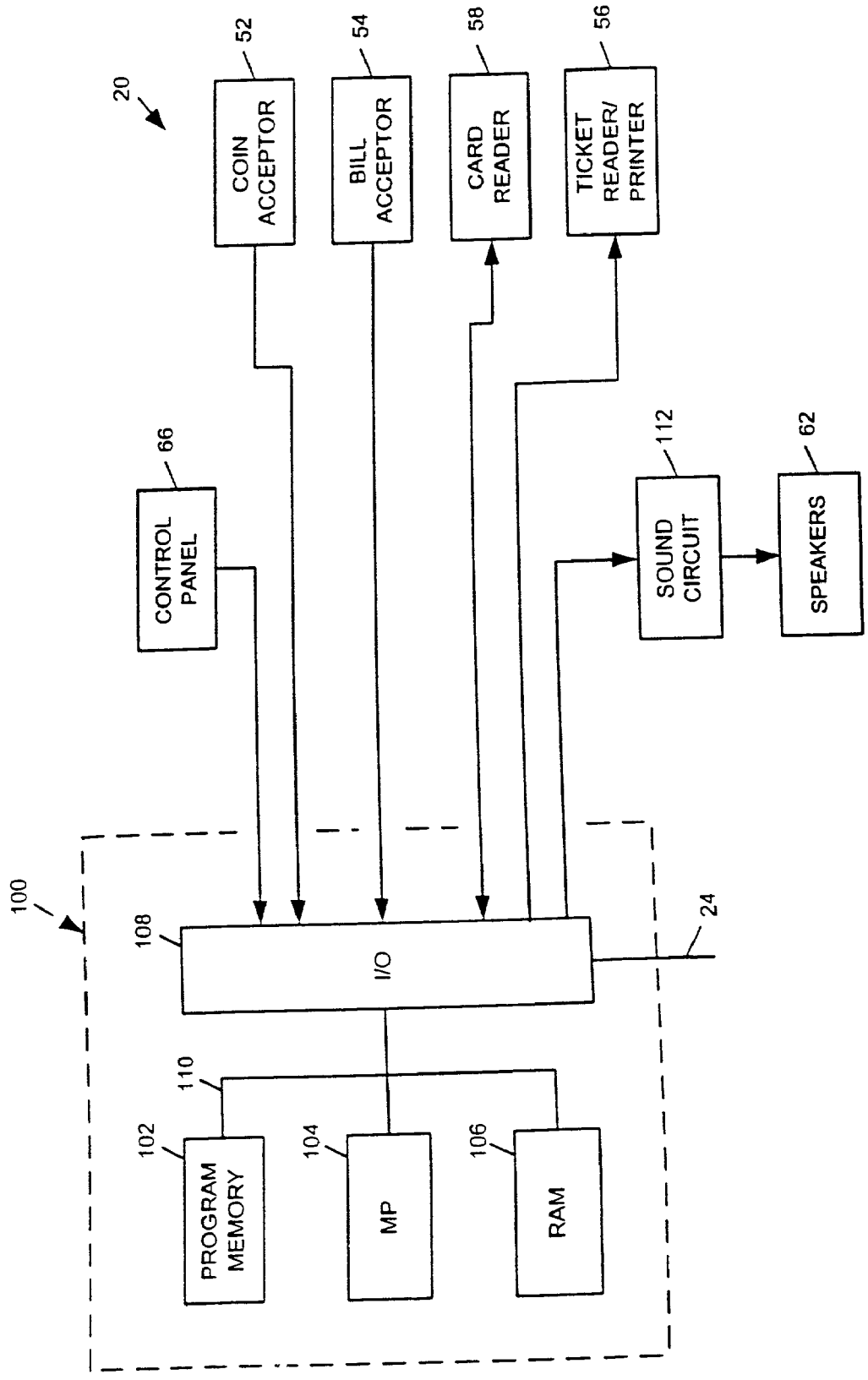

20
52
COIN ACCEPTOR
54
BILL ACCEPTOR
58
CARD READER
56
TICKET READER/ PRINTER
66
CONTROL PANEL
112
SOUND CIRCUIT
62
SPEAKERS
100
108
I/O
24
110
102
PROGRAM MEMORY
104
MP
106
RAM

FIG. 3

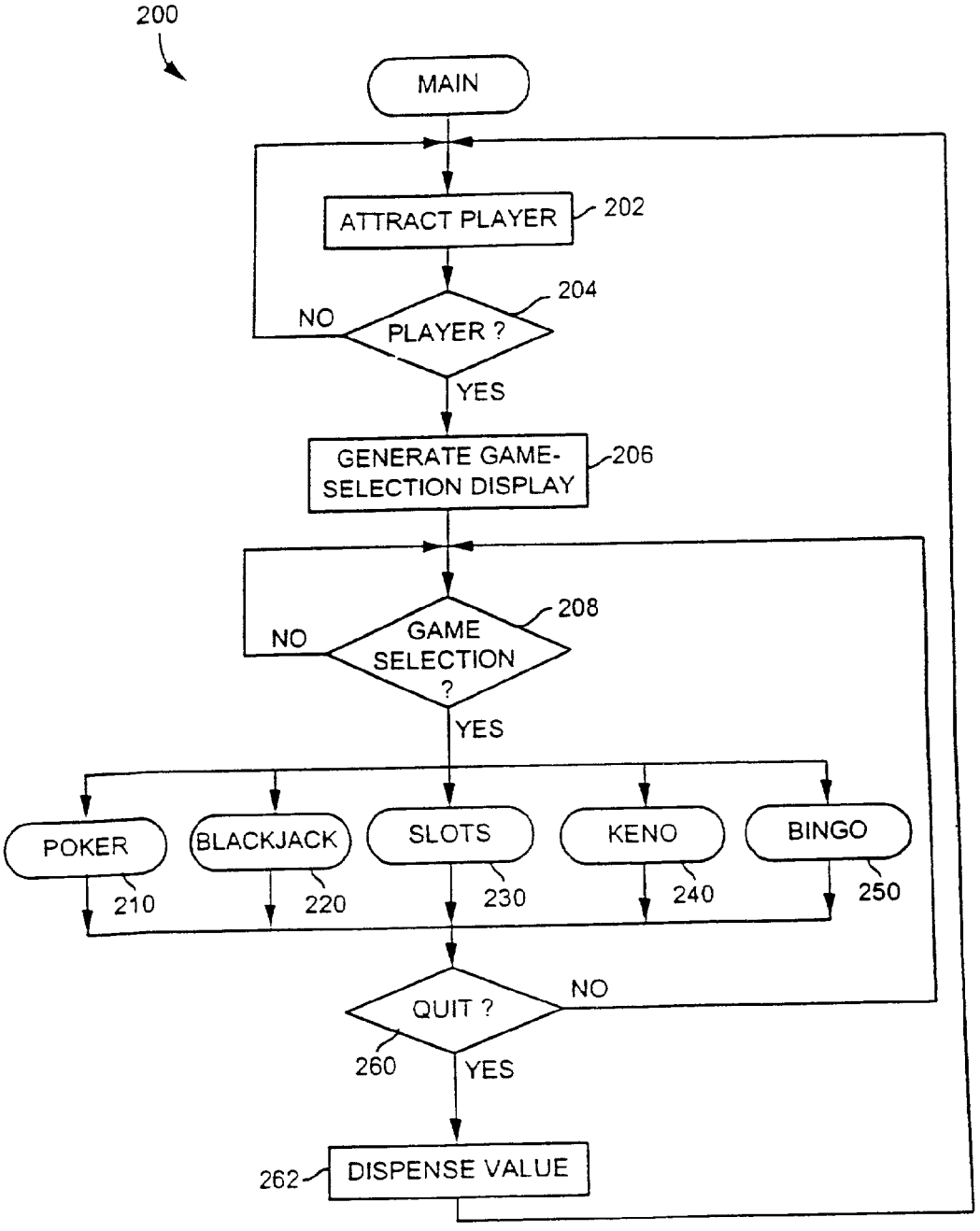

200
MAIN
ATTRACT PLAYER
202
204
NO
PLAYER ?
YES
GENERATE GAME-SELECTION DISPLAY
206
208
NO
GAME SELECTION ?
YES
POKER
BLACKJACK
SLOTS
KENO
BINGO
210
220
230
240
250
QUIT ?
NO
260
YES
262
DISPENSE VALUE

FIG. 4

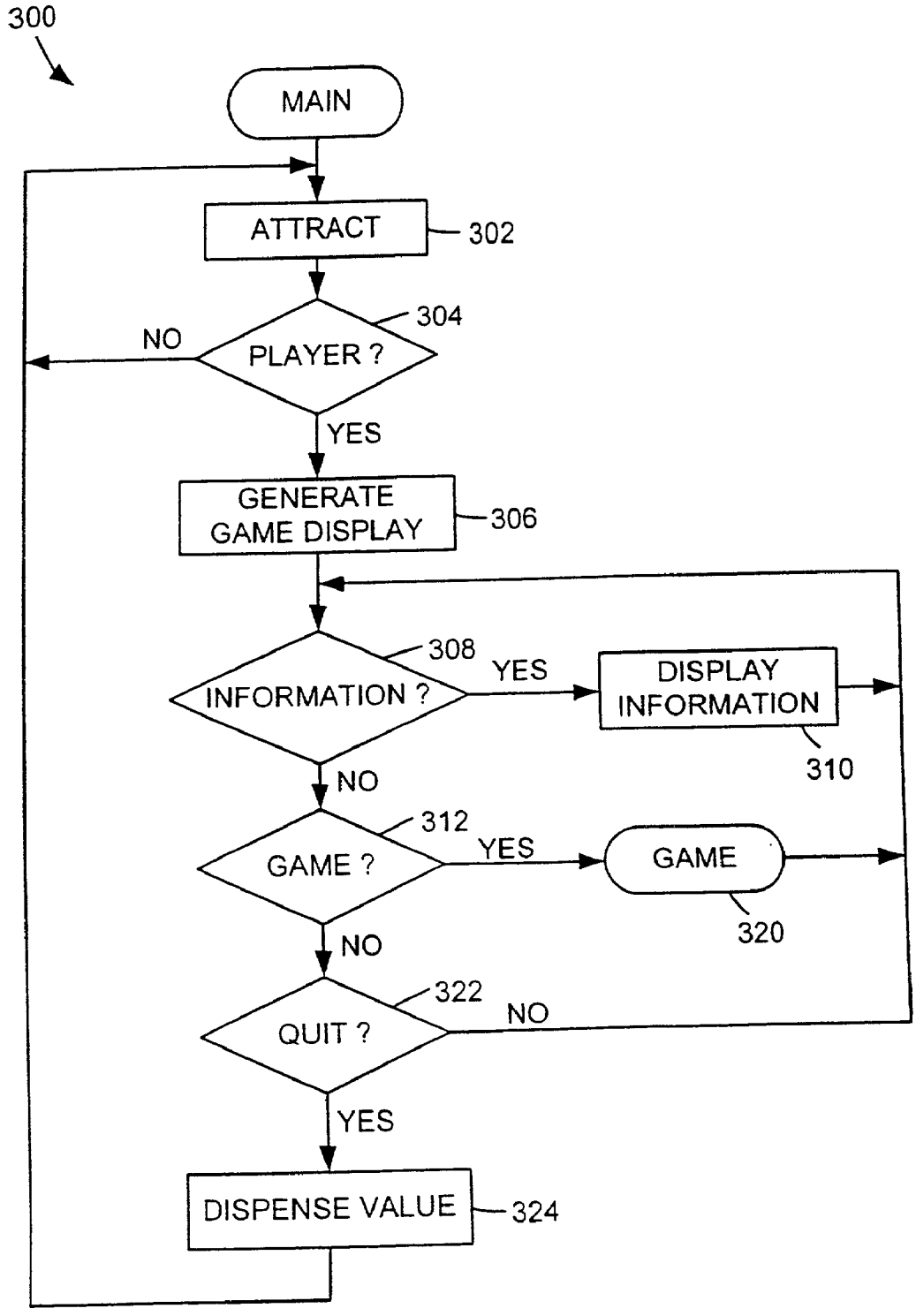

300
MAIN
ATTRACT
302
PLAYER ?
304
NO
YES
GENERATE GAME DISPLAY
306
INFORMATION ?
308
YES
DISPLAY INFORMATION
310
NO
GAME ?
312
YES
GAME
320
NO
QUIT ?
322
NO
YES
DISPENSE VALUE
324

FIG. 5

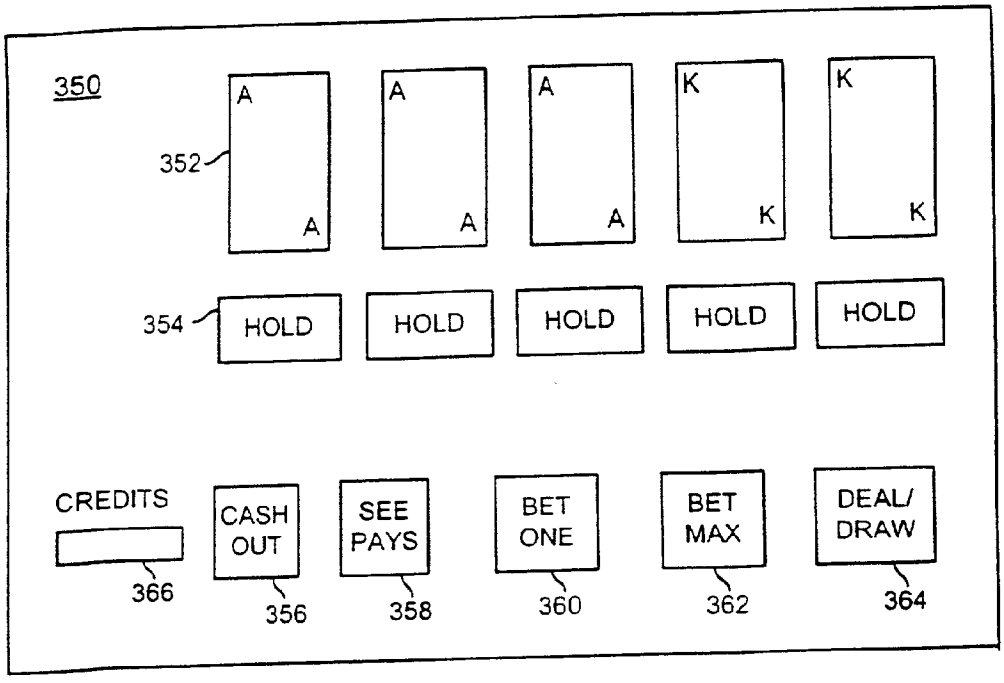

350
352
A
A
A
A
A
A
K
K
K
K
354
HOLD
HOLD
HOLD
HOLD
HOLD
CREDITS
366
CASH OUT
356
SEE PAYS
358
BET ONE
360
BET MAX
362
DEAL/ DRAW
364

FIG. 6

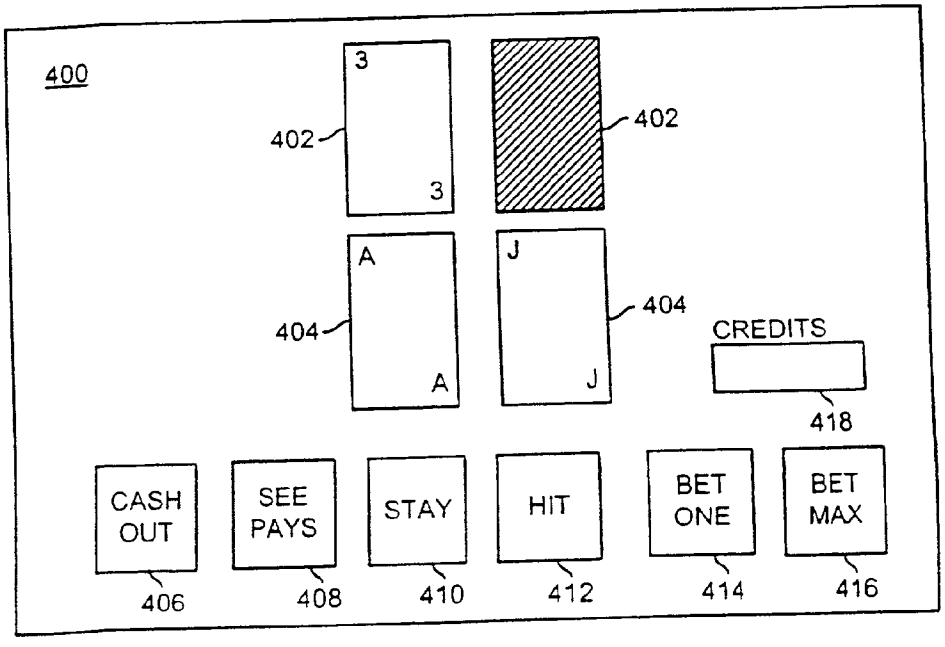

400
402
3
3
402
404
A
A
404
J
J
CREDITS
418
CASH OUT
406
SEE PAYS
408
STAY
410
HIT
412
BET ONE
414
BET MAX
416

FIG. 7

FIG. 8

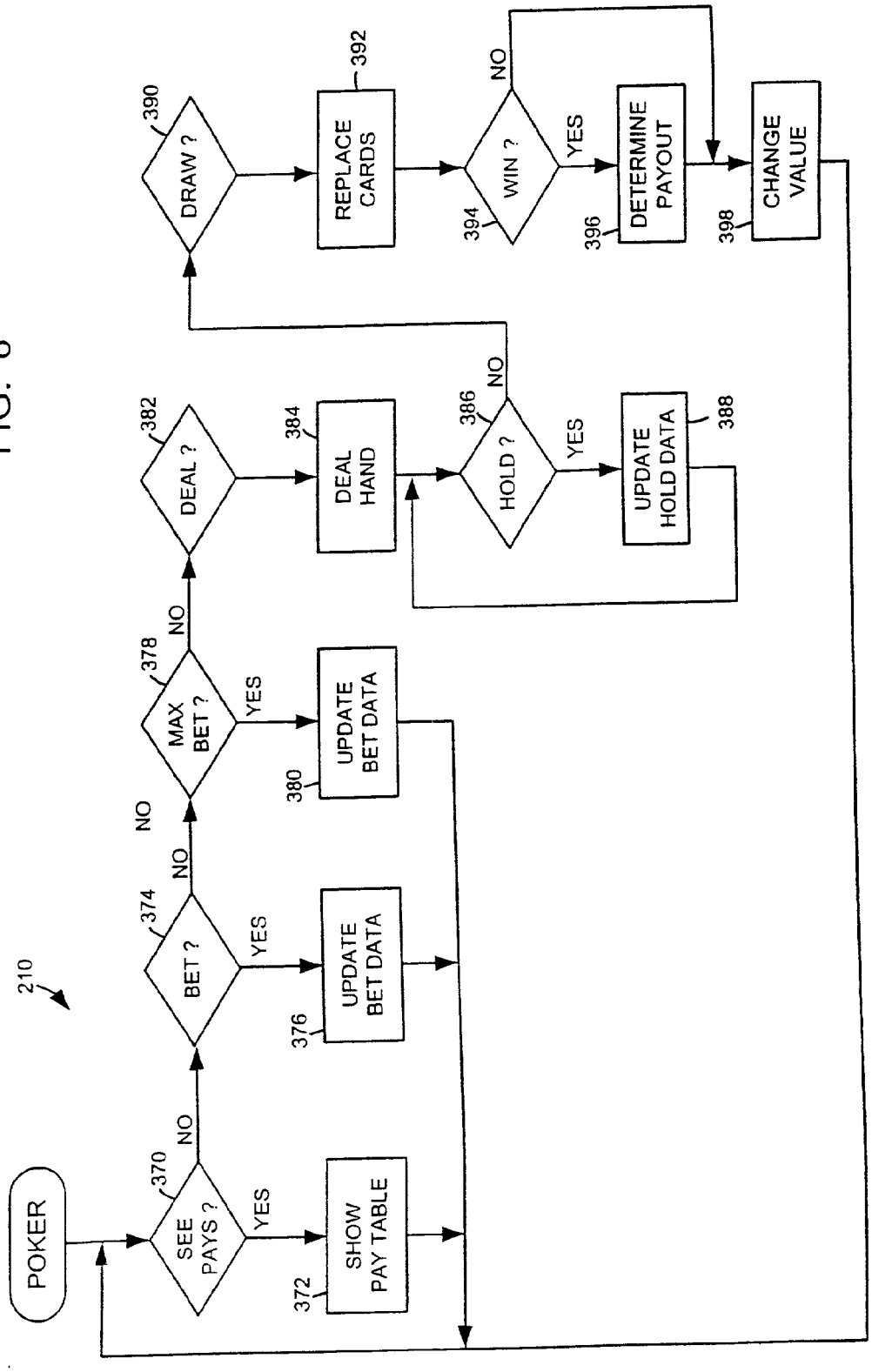

210
POKER
SEE PAYS ?
370
YES
NO
SHOW PAY TABLE
372
BET ?
374
YES
NO
UPDATE BET DATA
376
MAX BET ?
378
YES
NO
UPDATE BET DATA
380
DEAL ?
382
DEAL HAND
384
HOLD ?
386
YES
NO
UPDATE HOLD DATA
388
DRAW ?
390
REPLACE CARDS
392
WIN ?
394
YES
NO
DETERMINE PAYOUT
396
CHANGE VALUE
398

FIG. 9

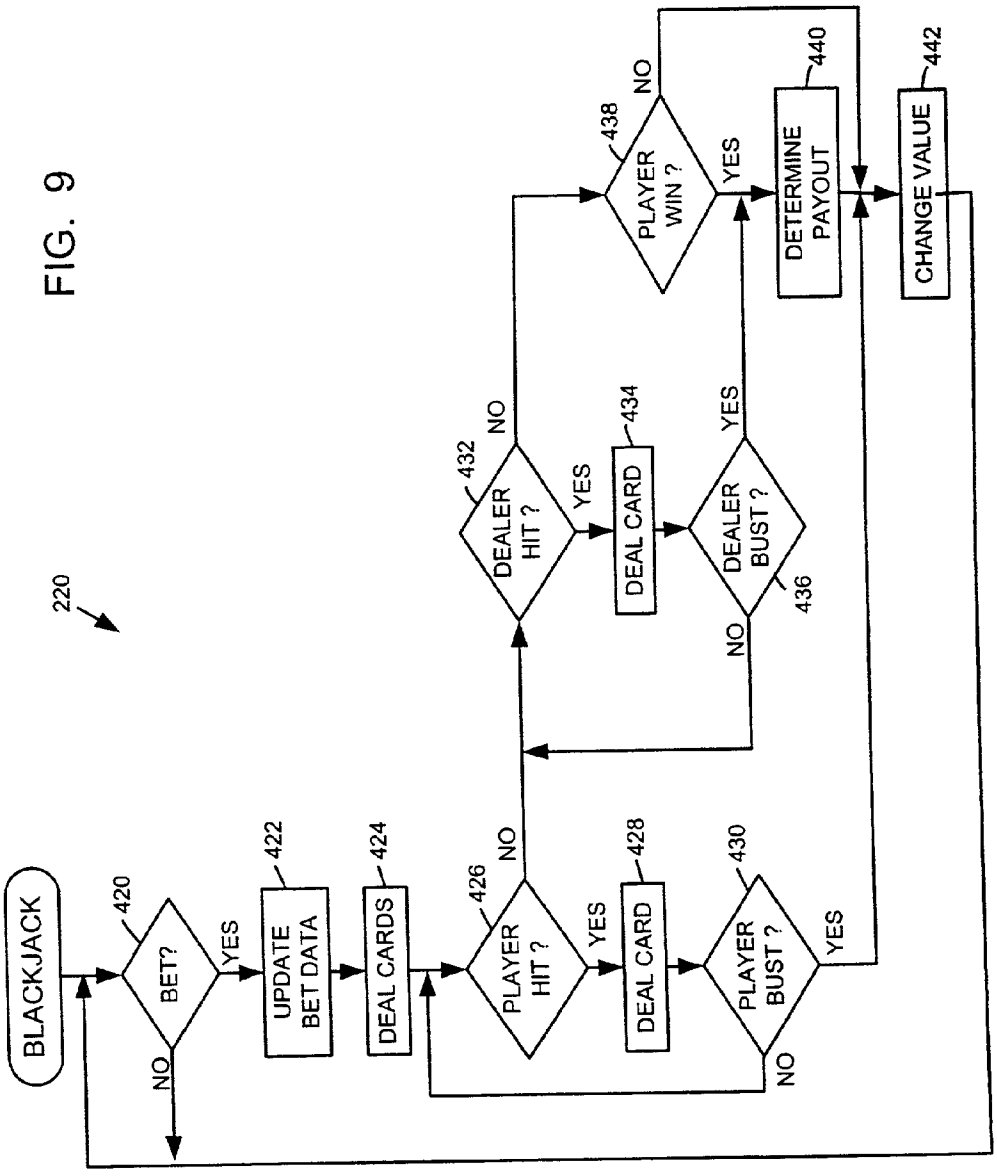
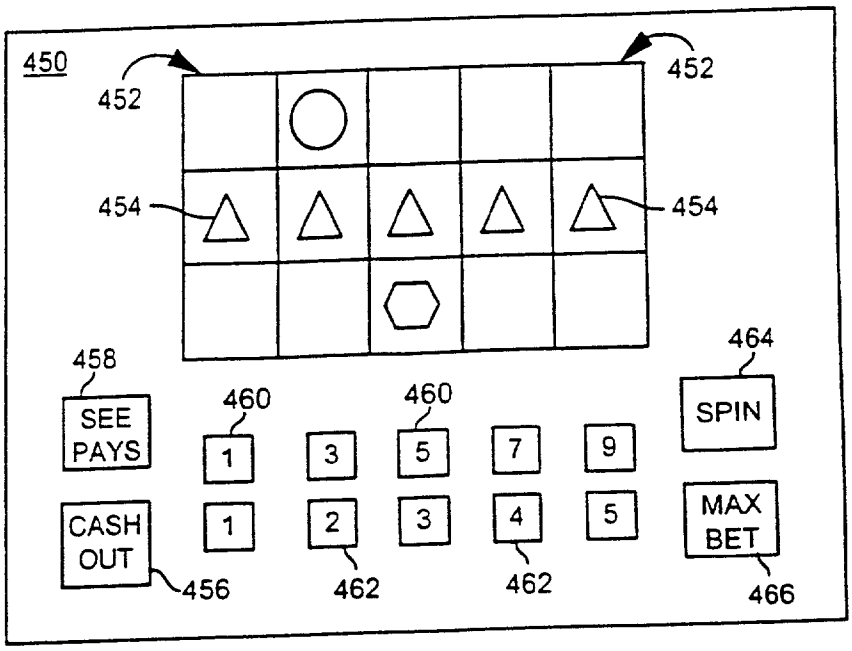

220
BLACKJACK
420
BET?
YES
NO
422
UPDATE BET DATA
424
DEAL CARDS
426
PLAYER HIT ?
YES
NO
428
DEAL CARD
430
PLAYER BUST ?
YES
NO
432
DEALER HIT ?
YES
NO
434
DEAL CARD
436
DEALER BUST ?
YES
NO
438
PLAYER WIN ?
YES
NO
440
DETERMINE PAYOUT
442
CHANGE VALUE

FIG. 10


450
452
452
454
454
458
SEE PAYS
460
460
464
SPIN
1
3
5
7
9
CASH OUT
1
2
3
4
5
MAX BET
456
462
462
466

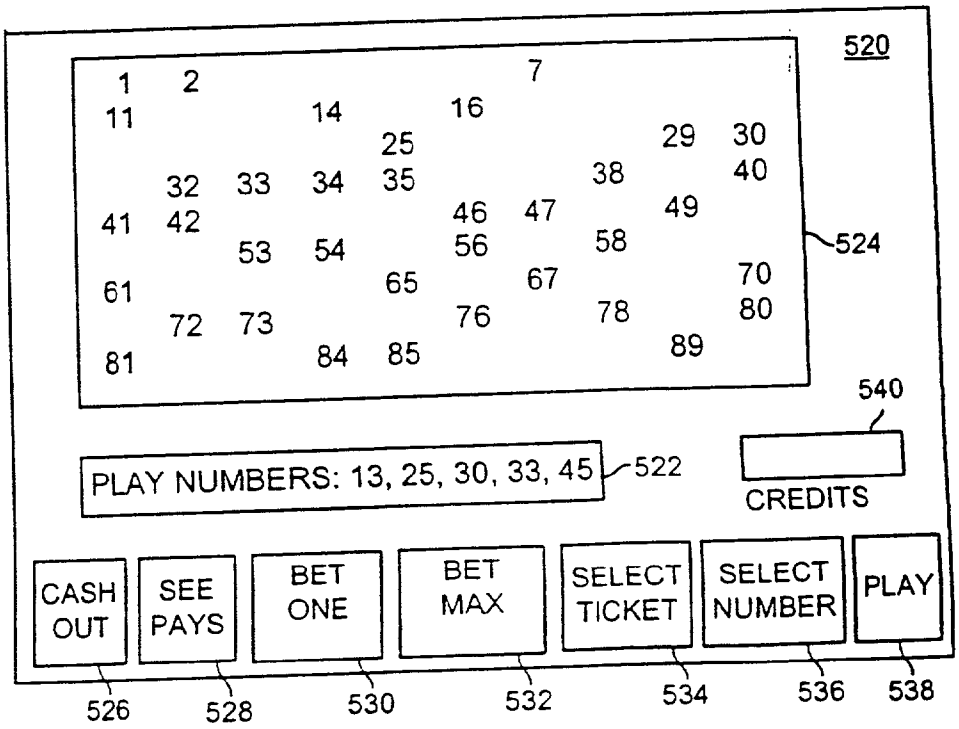

520
1 2 7
11 14 16
25 29 30
32 33 34 35 38 40
41 42 46 47 49
53 54 56 58
524
61 65 67 70
72 73 76 78 80
81 84 85 89
540
PLAY NUMBERS: 13, 25, 30, 33, 45
522
CREDITS
CASH OUT
SEE PAYS
BET ONE
BET MAX
SELECT TICKET
SELECT NUMBER
PLAY
526
528
530
532
534
536
538

FIG. 11

FIG. 12

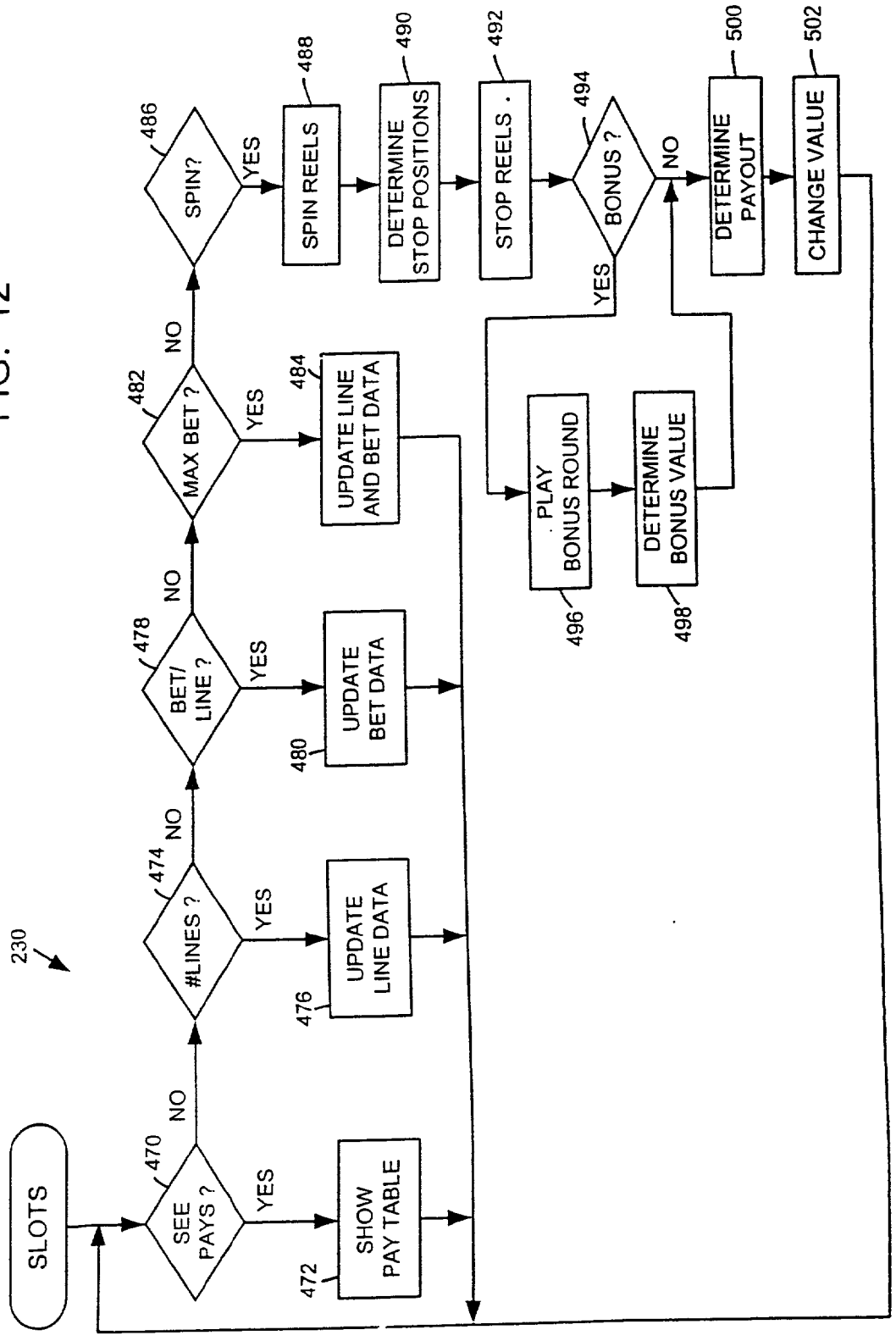
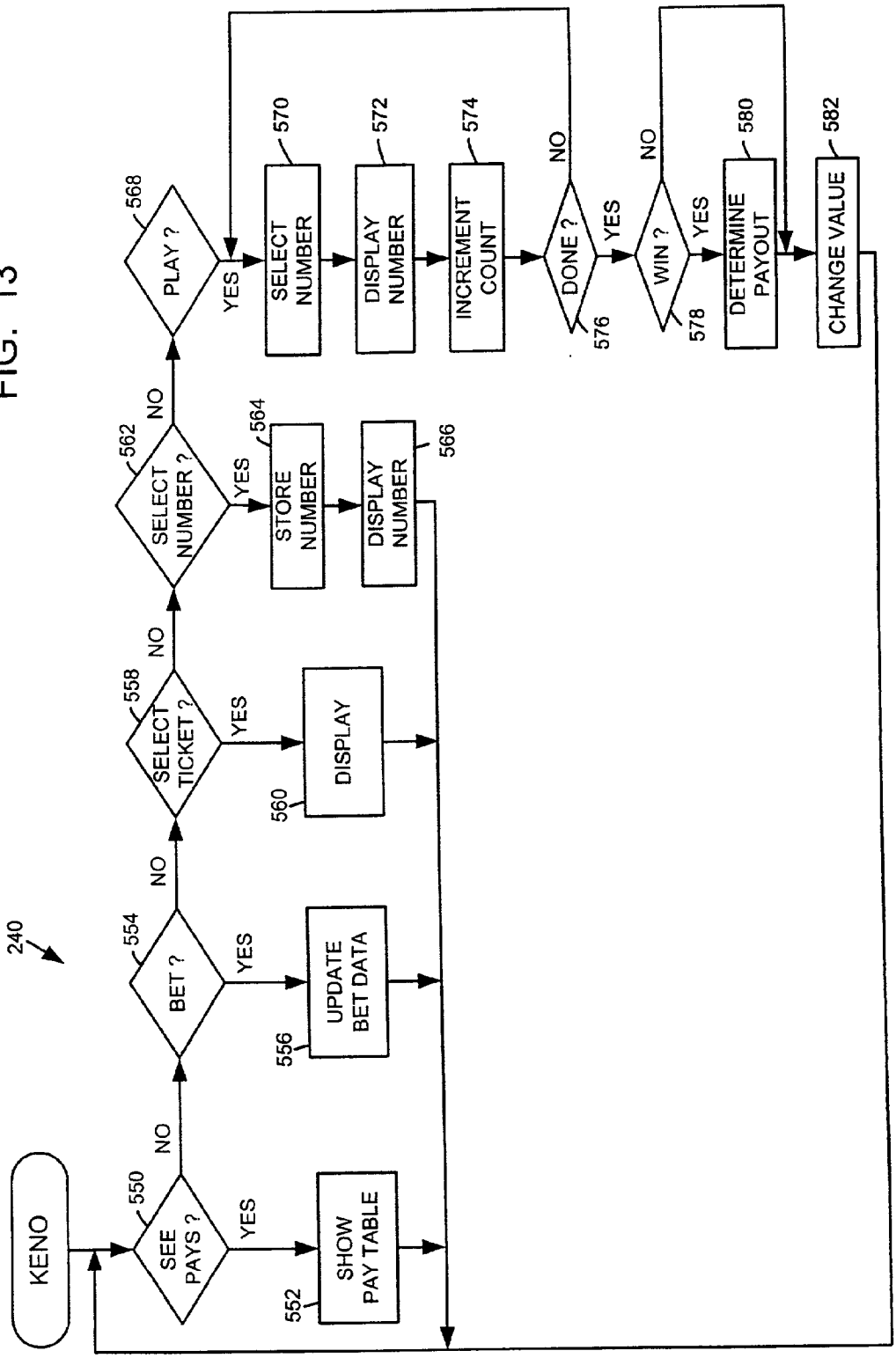

230
SLOTS
SEE PAYS ?
470
NO
YES
SHOW PAY TABLE
472
#LINES ?
474
NO
YES
UPDATE LINE DATA
476
BET/ LINE ?
478
NO
YES
UPDATE BET DATA
480
MAX BET ?
482
NO
YES
UPDATE LINE AND BET DATA
484
SPIN?
486
YES
SPIN REELS
488
DETERMINE STOP POSITIONS
490
STOP REELS .
492
BONUS ?
494
YES
NO
PLAY BONUS ROUND
496
DETERMINE BONUS VALUE
498
DETERMINE PAYOUT
500
CHANGE VALUE
502

FIG. 13


240
KENO
SEE PAYS ?
550
NO
YES
SHOW PAY TABLE
552
BET ?
554
NO
YES
UPDATE BET DATA
556
SELECT TICKET ?
558
NO
YES
DISPLAY
560
SELECT NUMBER ?
562
NO
YES
STORE NUMBER
564
DISPLAY NUMBER
566
PLAY ?
568
YES
SELECT NUMBER
570
DISPLAY NUMBER
572
INCREMENT COUNT
574
DONE ?
576
NO
YES
WIN ?
578
NO
YES
DETERMINE PAYOUT
580
CHANGE VALUE
582

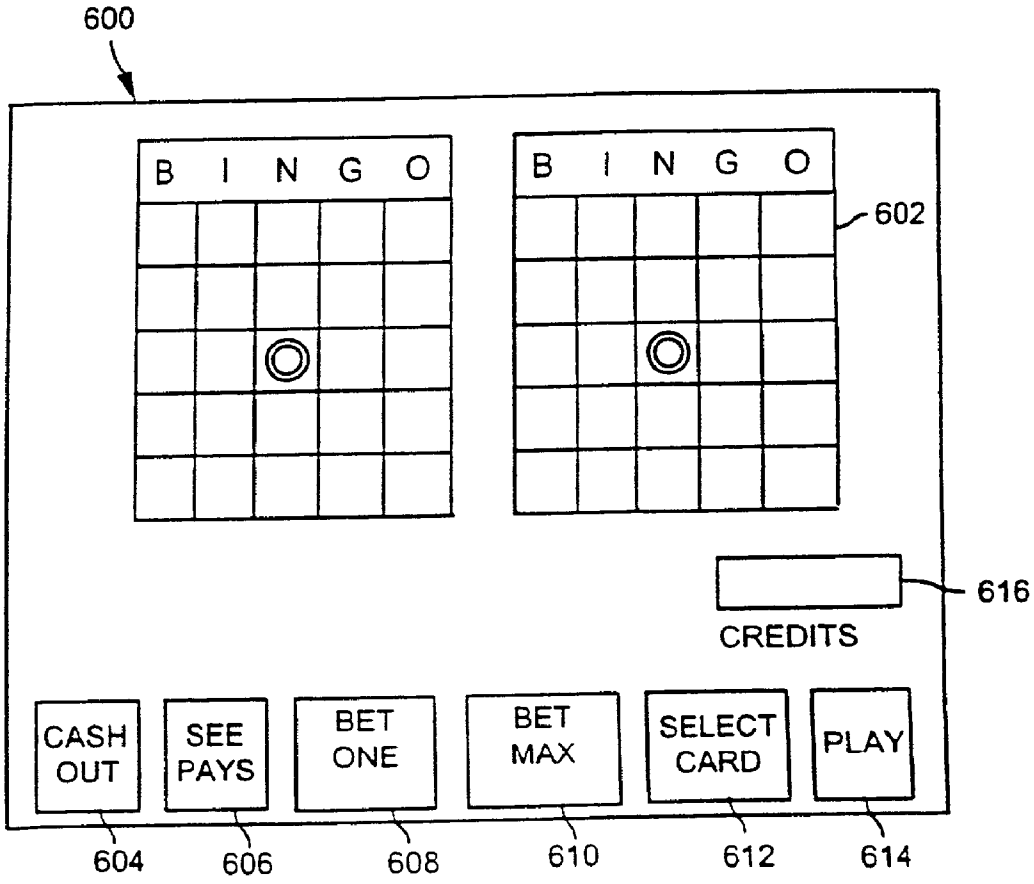

600
B I N G O
B I N G O
602
616
CREDITS
CASH OUT
SEE PAYS
BET ONE
BET MAX
SELECT CARD
PLAY
604
606
608
610
612
614

FIG. 14

FIG. 15

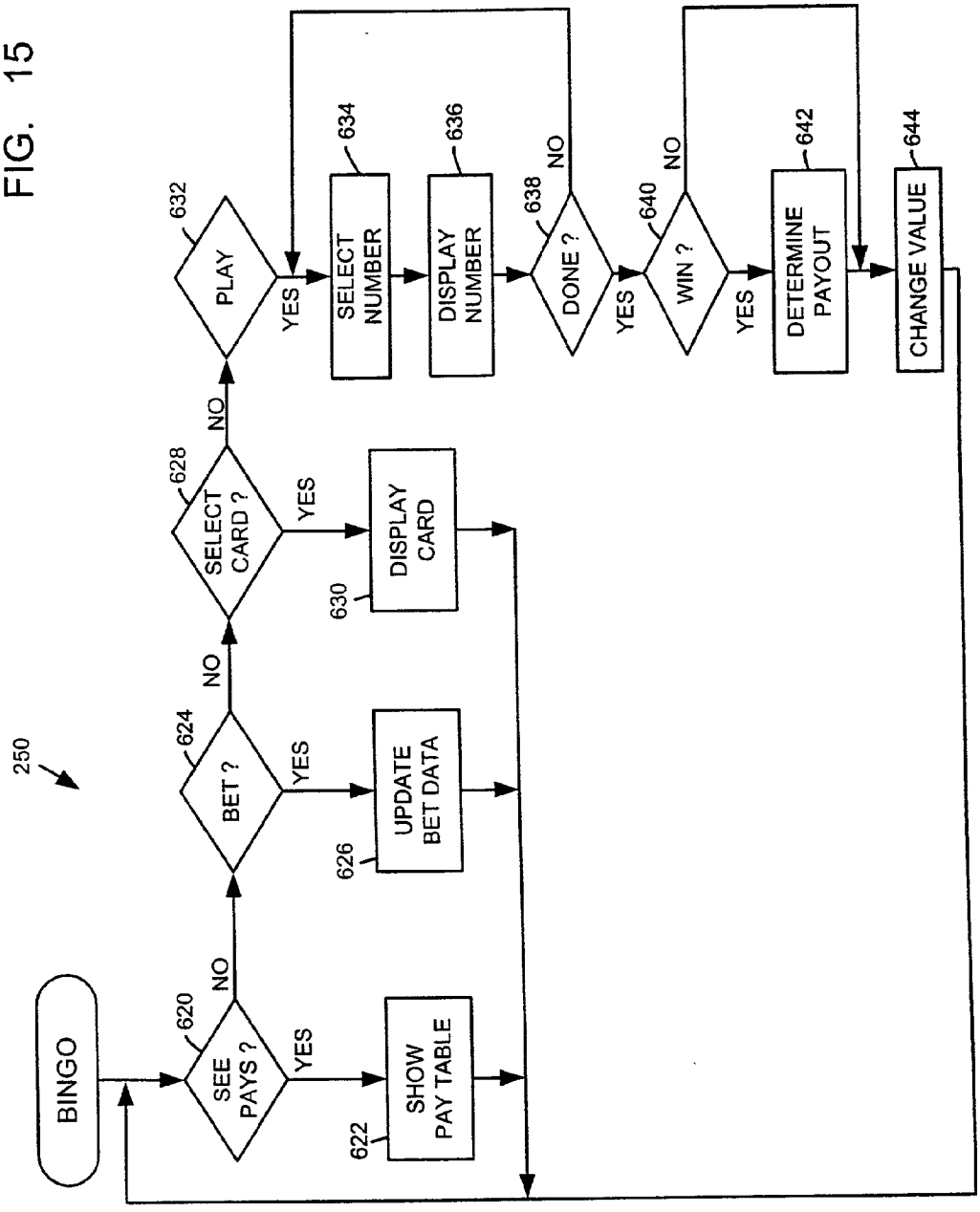

250
BINGO
620
SEE PAYS ?
YES
NO
622
SHOW PAY TABLE
624
BET ?
YES
NO
626
UPDATE BET DATA
628
SELECT CARD ?
YES
NO
630
DISPLAY CARD
632
PLAY
YES
634
SELECT NUMBER
636
DISPLAY NUMBER
638
DONE ?
YES
NO
640
WIN ?
YES
NO
642
DETERMINE PAYOUT
644
CHANGE VALUE

FIG. 16

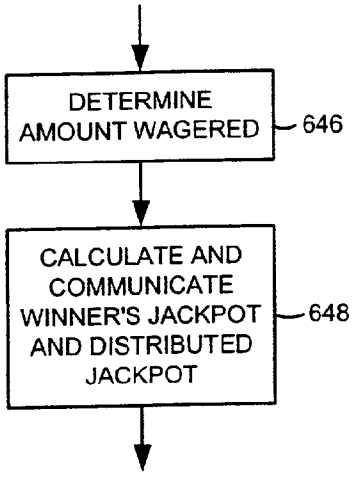
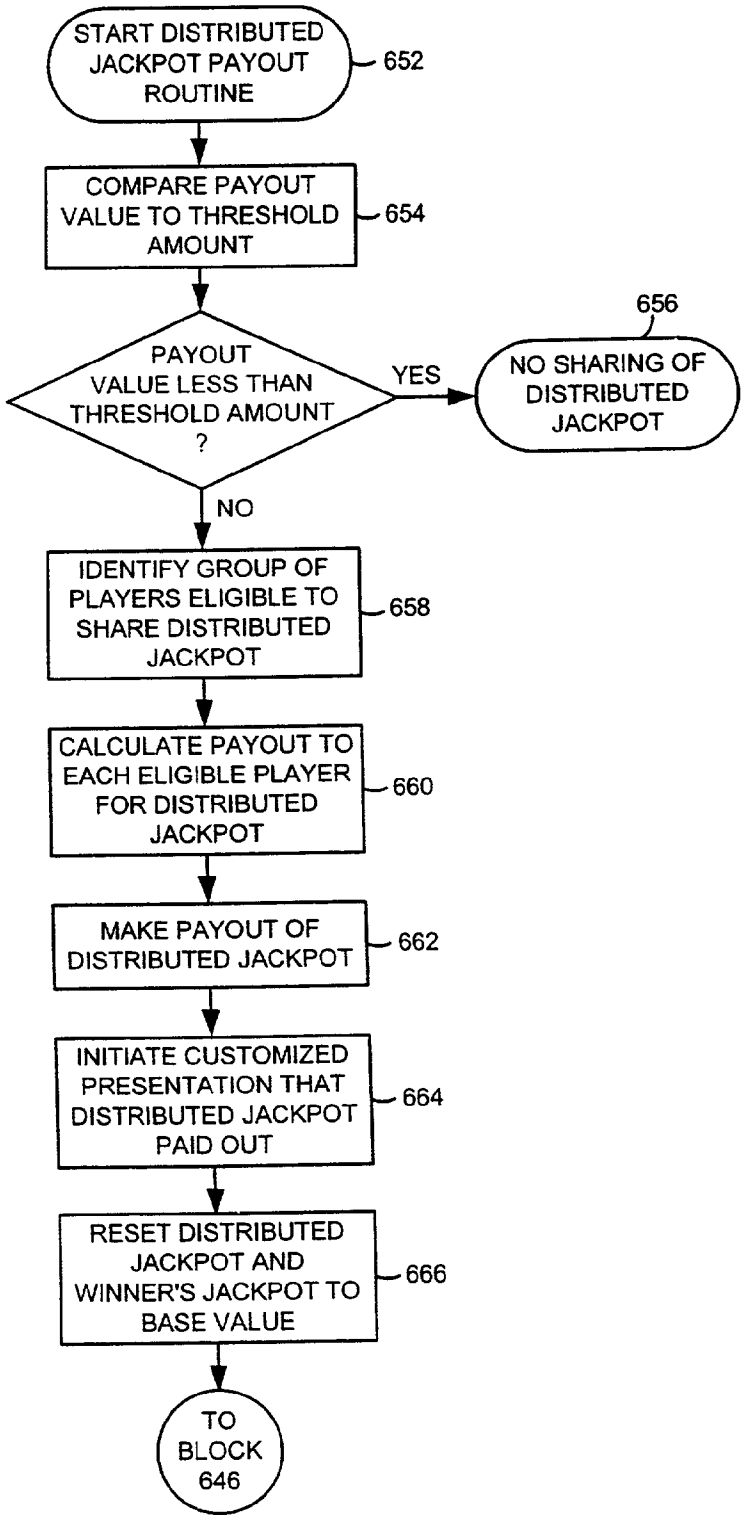

DETERMINE AMOUNT WAGERED
646
CALCULATE AND COMMUNICATE WINNER'S JACKPOT AND DISTRIBUTED JACKPOT
648

FIG. 17


START DISTRIBUTED JACKPOT PAYOUT ROUTINE
652
COMPARE PAYOUT VALUE TO THRESHOLD AMOUNT
654
PAYOUT VALUE LESS THAN THRESHOLD AMOUNT ?
YES
656
NO SHARING OF DISTRIBUTED JACKPOT
NO
IDENTIFY GROUP OF PLAYERS ELIGIBLE TO SHARE DISTRIBUTED JACKPOT
658
CALCULATE PAYOUT TO EACH ELIGIBLE PLAYER FOR DISTRIBUTED JACKPOT
660
MAKE PAYOUT OF DISTRIBUTED JACKPOT
662
INITIATE CUSTOMIZED PRESENTATION THAT DISTRIBUTED JACKPOT PAID OUT
664
RESET DISTRIBUTED JACKPOT AND WINNER'S JACKPOT TO BASE VALUE
666
TO BLOCK 646

METHOD AND APPARATUS FOR REWARDING MULTIPLE GAME PLAYERS FOR A SINGLE WIN

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0001] Gaming systems are common devices in casinos or other establishments. Such gaming systems typically include one or more gaming units, each capable of facilitating the play of one or more games such as, for example, slots, video blackjack, video poker, keno, and bingo.

[0002] Progressive gaming systems have been developed in which gaming units are electronically linked to one another and/or to a host computer. (The progressive gaming system may be configured such that one or more of the electronically linked gaming units serves as a host computer.) The electronically linked gaming units can be located near or far from one another and may even be located in separate casinos, such as in a so-called wide are progressive ("WAP") network.

[0003] Electronically linking the gaming units permits the gaming units to be configured in a group, so that people using each of the gaming units in the group each add to, and each have a chance to win, a progressive jackpot. The progressive jackpot grows in magnitude with each wager made on any one of the group of gaming units in the progressive gaming system. Accordingly, if a large number of gaming units form the group in the progressive gaming system, the progressive jackpot may be dramatically bigger than the jackpot for each gaming unit if the gaming units were configured in a stand-alone manner.

[0004] One example of a progressive gaming system operates as follows. A player begins a game by wagering an amount of money at a gaming unit that is linked to other similar gaming units and to a host computer to form a progressive network. A fraction of the wager is allocated to a progressive jackpot. The amount of the progressive jackpot is then communicated to each of the gaming units in the progressive network, and may be displayed on each of the gaming units in the progressive network and/or on a large overhead electronic sign in the vicinity of one or more of the gaming units in the progressive network.

[0005] In such a progressive gaming system, in the event that one of the gaming units in the progressive network yields a winning game outcome that is associated with a progressive jackpot, the winning game outcome is communicated to the host computer. The host computer may be programmed to respond to this communication by performing a number of security checks, such as verifying that the winning game outcome is correct and that the gaming unit that yielded the winning game outcome was not tampered with. If this security check leads to a conclusion that the winning game outcome is invalid, the invalid winning game outcome is rejected and no payout is made.

[0006] If the host computer determines that the winning game outcome is valid, the host computer communicates an acknowledgement of the winning game outcome to the winning gaming unit. The host computer then communicates, to the entity or entities responsible for paying the winning player (which may be a gaming casino and/or a host company, if the progressive network includes gaming units in more than one location), the amount to be paid to the winning player. Finally, the host computer resets the progressive jackpot to a base value and communicates the new progressive jackpot to all of the gaming units in the progressive network.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0007] In accordance with one aspect of the invention, a gaming apparatus may include a display unit that is capable of generating video images, a value input device, and a controller operatively coupled to the display unit and the value input device. The controller may include a processor and a memory operatively coupled to the processor, and may be programmed to allow a person to make a wager. The controller may also be programmed to cause a video image to be generated on the display unit. The video image may represent a game, such as video poker, video blackjack, video slots, video keno or video bingo. The controller may be programmed to determine a value payout associated with an outcome of the game, to compare the value payout to a threshold amount, and to generate a distributed jackpot payout message if the value payout is greater than or equal to the threshold amount.

[0008] Additional aspects of the invention will be apparent to those of ordinary skill in the art in view of the detailed description of various embodiments, which is made with reference to the drawings, a brief description of which is provided below.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] **FIG. 1** is a block diagram of an embodiment of a gaming system;

[0010] **FIG. 2** is a perspective view of an embodiment of one of the gaming units shown schematically in **FIG. 1**;

[0011] **FIG. 2A** illustrates an embodiment of a control panel for a gaming unit;

[0012] **FIG. 3** is a block diagram of the electronic components of the gaming unit of **FIG. 2**;

[0013] **FIG. 4** is a flowchart of an embodiment of a main routine that may be performed during operation of one or more of the gaming units;

[0014] **FIG. 5** is a flowchart of an alternative embodiment of a main routine that may be performed during operation of one or more of the gaming units;

[0015] **FIG. 6** is an illustration of an embodiment of a visual display that may be displayed during performance of the video poker routine of **FIG. 8**;

[0016] **FIG. 7** is an illustration of an embodiment of a visual display that may be displayed during performance of the video blackjack routine of **FIG. 9**;

[0017] **FIG. 8** is a flowchart of an embodiment of a video poker routine that may be performed by one or more of the gaming units;

[0018] **FIG. 9** is a flowchart of an embodiment of a video blackjack routine that may be performed by one or more of the gaming units;

[0019] **FIG. 10** is an illustration of an embodiment of a visual display that may be displayed during performance of the slots routine of **FIG. 12**;

[0020] **FIG. 11** is an illustration of an embodiment of a visual display that may be displayed during performance of the video keno routine of **FIG. 13**;

[0021] **FIG. 12** is a flowchart of an embodiment of a slots routine that may be performed by one or more of the gaming units;

[0022] **FIG. 13** is a flowchart of an embodiment of a video keno routine that may be performed by one or more of the gaming units;

[0023] **FIG. 14** is an illustration of an embodiment of a visual display that may be displayed during performance of the video bingo routine of **FIG. 15**;

[0024] **FIG. 15** is a flowchart of an embodiment of a video bingo routine that may be performed by one or more of the gaming units;

[0025] **FIG. 16** is a flowchart of an embodiment of a wagering routine for the establishment of a winner's jackpot and a distributed jackpot; and

[0026] **FIG. 17** is a flowchart of an embodiment of a payout routine for the distribution of the winner's jackpot and the distributed jackpot.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF VARIOUS EMBODIMENTS

[0027] Although the following text sets forth a detailed description of numerous different embodiments of the invention, it should be understood that the legal scope of the invention is defined by the words of the claims set forth at the end of this patent. The detailed description is to be construed as exemplary only and does not describe every possible embodiment of the invention since describing every possible embodiment would be impractical, if not impossible. Numerous alternative embodiments could be implemented, using either current technology or technology developed after the filing date of this patent, which would still fall within the scope of the claims defining the invention.

[0028] It should also be understood that, unless a term is expressly defined in this patent using the sentence "As used herein, the term '_____' is hereby defined to mean . . . " or a similar sentence, there is no intent to limit the meaning of that term, either expressly or by implication, beyond its plain or ordinary meaning, and such term should not be interpreted to be limited in scope based on any statement made in any section of this patent (other than the language of the claims). To the extent that any term recited in the claims at the end of this patent is referred to in this patent in a manner consistent with a single meaning, that is done for sake of clarity only so as to not confuse the reader, and it is not intended that such claim term by limited, by implication or otherwise, to that single meaning. Finally, it is not intended that the scope of any claim element be interpreted based on the application of 35 U.S.C. §112, sixth paragraph.

[0029] **FIG. 1** illustrates an embodiment of a casino gaming system **10** in accordance with the invention. Referring to **FIG. 1**, the casino gaming system **10** may include a first group or network **12** of casino gaming units **20** operatively coupled to a network computer **22** via a network data link or bus **24**. The casino gaming system **10** may include a second group or network **26** of casino gaming units **30** operatively coupled to a network computer **32** via a network data link or bus **34**. The first and second gaming networks **12, 26** may be operatively coupled to each other via a network **40**, which may comprise, for example, the Internet, a wide area network (WAN), or a local area network (LAN) via a first network link **42** and a second network link **44**.

[0030] The first network **12** of gaming units **20** may be provided in a first casino, and the second network **26** of gaming units **30** may be provided in a second casino located in a separate geographic location than the first casino. For example, the two casinos may be located in different areas of the same city, or they may be located in different states. The network **40** may include a plurality of network computers or server computers (not shown), each of which may be operatively interconnected. Where the network **40** comprises the Internet, data communication may take place over the communication links **42, 44** via an Internet communication protocol.

[0031] The network computer **22** may be a host computer, a server computer, or one of the gaming units **20**, and may be used to accumulate and analyze data relating to the operation of the gaming units **20**. For example, the network computer **22** may continuously receive data from each of the gaming units **20** indicative of the dollar amount and number of wagers being made on each of the gaming units **20**, data indicative of how much each of the gaming units **20** is paying out in winnings, data regarding the identity and gaming habits of players playing each of the gaming units **20**, etc. The network computer **32** may be a server computer and may be used to perform the same or different functions in relation to the gaming units **30** as the network computer **22** described above.

[0032] Although each network **12, 26** is shown to include one network computer **22, 32** and four gaming units **20, 30**, it should be understood that different numbers of computers and gaming units may be utilized. For example, the network **12** may include a plurality of network computers **22** and tens or hundreds of gaming units **20**, all of which may be interconnected via the data link **24**. The data link **24** may provided as a dedicated hardwired link or a wireless link. Although the data link **24** is shown as a single data link **24**, the data link **24** may comprise multiple data links.

[0033] **FIG. 2** is a perspective view of one possible embodiment of one or more of the gaming units **20**. Although the following description addresses the design of the gaming units **20**, it should be understood that the gaming units **30** may have the same design as the gaming units **20** described below. It should be understood that the design of one or more of the gaming units **20** may be different than the design of other gaming units **20**, and that the design of one or more of the gaming units **30** may be different than the design of other gaming units **30**. Each gaming unit **20** may be any type of casino gaming unit and may have various different structures and methods of operation. For exemplary purposes, various designs of the gaming units **20** are described below, but it should be understood that numerous other designs may be utilized.

[0034] Referring to **FIG. 2**, the casino gaming unit **20** may include a housing or cabinet **50** and one or more input devices, which may include a coin slot or acceptor **52**, a paper currency acceptor **54**, a ticket reader/printer **56** and a card reader **58**, which may be used to input value to the

gaming unit **20**. A value input device may include any device that can accept value from a customer. As used herein, the term "value" may encompass gaming tokens, coins, paper currency, ticket vouchers, credit or debit cards, and any other object representative of value.

[**0035**] If provided on the gaming unit **20**, the ticket reader/printer **56** may be used to read and/or print or otherwise encode ticket vouchers **60**. The ticket vouchers **60** may be composed of paper or another printable or encodable material and may have one or more of the following informational items printed or encoded thereon: the casino name, the type of ticket voucher, a validation number, a bar code with control and/or security data, the date and time of issuance of the ticket voucher, redemption instructions and restrictions, a description of an award, and any other information that may be necessary or desirable. Different types of ticket vouchers **60** could be used, such as bonus ticket vouchers, cash-redemption ticket vouchers, casino chip ticket vouchers, extra game play ticket vouchers, merchandise ticket vouchers, restaurant ticket vouchers, show ticket vouchers, etc. The ticket vouchers **60** could be printed with an optically readable material such as ink, or data on the ticket vouchers **60** could be magnetically encoded. The ticket reader/printer **56** may be provided with the ability to both read and print ticket vouchers **60**, or it may be provided with the ability to only read or only print or encode ticket vouchers **60**. In the latter case, for example, some of the gaming units **20** may have ticket printers **56** that may be used to print ticket vouchers **60**, which could then be used by a player in other gaming units **20** that have ticket readers **56**.

[**0036**] If provided, the card reader **58** may include any type of card reading device, such as a magnetic card reader or an optical card reader, and may be used to read data from a card offered by a player, such as a credit card or a player tracking card. If provided for player tracking purposes, the card reader **58** may be used to read data from, and/or write data to, player tracking cards that are capable of storing data representing the identity of a player, the identity of a casino, the player's gaming habits, etc.

[**0037**] The gaming unit **20** may include one or more audio speakers **62**, a coin payout tray **64**, an input control panel **66**, and a color video display unit **70** for displaying images relating to the game or games provided by the gaming unit **20**. Such images may include distributed jackpot information. The audio speakers **62** may generate audio representing sounds such as the noise of spinning slot machine reels, a dealer's voice, music, announcements or any other audio related to a casino game. The input control panel **66** may be provided with a plurality of pushbuttons or touch-sensitive areas that may be pressed by a player to select games, make wagers, make gaming decisions, etc.

[**0038**] **FIG. 2A** illustrates one possible embodiment of the control panel **66**, which may be used where the gaming unit **20** is a slot machine having a plurality of mechanical or "virtual" reels. Referring to **FIG. 2A**, the control panel **66** may include a "See Pays" button **72** that, when activated, causes the display unit **70** to generate one or more display screens showing the odds or payout information (which may include distributed jackpot information) for the game or games provided by the gaming unit **20**. As used herein, the term "button" is intended to encompass any device that allows a player to make an input, such as an input device that must be depressed to make an input selection or a display area that a player may simply touch. The control panel **66** may include a "Cash Out" button **74** that may be activated when a player decides to terminate play on the gaming unit **20**, in which case the gaming unit **20** may return value to the player, such as by returning a number of coins to the player via the payout tray **64**.

[**0039**] If the gaming unit **20** provides a slots game having a plurality of reels and a plurality of paylines which define winning combinations of reel symbols, the control panel **66** may be provided with a plurality of selection buttons **76**, each of which allows the player to select a different number of paylines prior to spinning the reels. For example, five buttons **76** may be provided, each of which may allow a player to select one, three, five, seven or nine paylines.

[**0040**] If the gaming unit **20** provides a slots game having a plurality of reels, the control panel **66** may be provided with a plurality of selection buttons **78** each of which allows a player to specify a wager amount for each payline selected. For example, if the smallest wager accepted by the gaming unit **20** is a quarter ($0.25), the gaming unit **20** may be provided with five selection buttons **78**, each of which may allow a player to select one, two, three, four or five quarters to wager for each payline selected. In that case, if a player were to activate the "5" button **76** (meaning that five paylines were to be played on the next spin of the reels) and then activate the "3" button **78** (meaning that three coins per payline were to be wagered), the total wager would be $3.75 (assuming the minimum bet was $0.25).

[**0041**] The control panel **66** may include a "Max Bet" button **80** to allow a player to make the maximum wager allowable for a game. In the above example, where up to nine paylines were provided and up to five quarters could be wagered for each payline selected, the maximum wager would be 45 quarters, or $11.25. The control panel **66** may include a spin button **82** to allow the player to initiate spinning of the reels of a slots game after a wager has been made.

[**0042**] In **FIG. 2A, a** rectangle is shown around the buttons **72, 74, 76, 78, 80, 82**. It should be understood that that rectangle simply designates, for ease of reference, an area in which the buttons **72, 74, 76, 78, 80, 82** may be located. Consequently, the term "control panel" should not be construed to imply that a panel or plate separate from the housing **50** of the gaming unit **20** is required, and the term "control panel" may encompass a plurality or grouping of player activatable buttons.

[**0043**] Although one possible control panel **66** is described above, it should be understood that different buttons could be utilized in the control panel **66**, and that the particular buttons used may depend on the game or games that could be played on the gaming unit **20**. Although the control panel **66** is shown to be separate from the display unit **70**, it should be understood that the control panel **66** could be generated by the display unit **70**. In that case, each of the buttons of the control panel **66** could be a colored area generated by the display unit **70**, and some type of mechanism may be associated with the display unit **70** to detect when each of the buttons was touched, such as a touch-sensitive screen.

GAMING UNIT ELECTRONICS

[0044] **FIG. 3** is a block diagram of a number of components that may be incorporated in the gaming unit **20**. Referring to **FIG. 3**, the gaming unit **20** may include a controller **100** that may comprise a program memory **102**, a microcontroller or microprocessor (MP) **104**, a random-access memory (RAM) **106** and an input/output (I/O) circuit **108**, all of which may be interconnected via an address/data bus **110**. It should be appreciated that although only one microprocessor **104** is shown, the controller **100** may include multiple microprocessors **104**. Similarly, the memory of the controller **100** may include multiple RAMs **106** and multiple program memories **102**. Although the I/O circuit **108** is shown as a single block, it should be appreciated that the I/O circuit **108** may include a number of different types of I/O circuits. The RAM(s) **104** and program memories **102** may be implemented as semiconductor memories, magnetically readable memories, and/or optically readable memories, for example.

[0045] **FIG. 3** illustrates that the control panel **66**, the coin acceptor **52**, the bill acceptor **54**, the card reader **58** and the ticket reader/printer **56** may be operatively coupled to the I/O circuit **108**, each of those components being so coupled by either a unidirectional or bidirectional, single-line or multiple-line data link, which may depend on the design of the component that is used. The speaker(s) **62** may be operatively coupled to a sound circuit **112**, that may comprise a voice- and sound-synthesis circuit or that may comprise a driver circuit. The sound-generating circuit **112** may be coupled to the I/O circuit **108**.

[0046] As shown in **FIG. 3**, the components **52, 54, 56, 58, 66, 112** may be connected to the I/O circuit **108** via a respective direct line or conductor. Different connection schemes could be used. For example, one or more of the components shown in **FIG. 3** may be connected to the I/O circuit **108** via a common bus or other data link that is shared by a number of components. Furthermore, some of the components may be directly connected to the microprocessor **104** without passing through the I/O circuit **108**.

OVERALL OPERATION OF GAMING UNIT

[0047] One manner in which one or more of the gaming units **20** (and one or more of the gaming units **30**) may operate is described below in connection with a number of flowcharts which represent a number of portions or routines of one or more computer programs, which may be stored in one or more of the memories of the controller **100**. The computer program(s) or portions thereof may be stored remotely, outside of the gaming unit **20**, and may control the operation of the gaming unit **20** from a remote location. Such remote control may be facilitated with the use of a wireless connection, or by an Internet interface that connects the gaming unit **20** with a remote computer (such as one of the network computers **22, 32**) having a memory in which the computer program portions are stored. The computer program portions may be written in any high level language such as C, C+, C++ or the like or any low-level, assembly or machine language. By storing the computer program portions therein, various portions of the memories **102, 106** are physically and/or structurally configured in accordance with computer program instructions.

[0048] **FIG. 4** is a flowchart of a main operating routine **200** that may be stored in the memory of the controller **100**. Referring to **FIG. 4**, the main routine **200** may begin operation at block **202** during which an attraction sequence may be performed in an attempt to induce a potential player in a casino to play the gaming unit **20**. The attraction sequence may be performed by displaying one or more video images on the display unit **70** and/or causing one or more sound segments, such as voice or music, to be generated via the speakers **62**. The attraction sequence may include a scrolling list of games that may be played on the gaming unit **20** and/or video images of various games being played, such as video poker, video blackjack, video slots, video keno, video bingo, etc.

[0049] During performance of the attraction sequence, if a potential player makes any input to the gaming unit **20** as determined at block **204**, the attraction sequence may be terminated and a game-selection display may be generated on the display unit **70** at block **206** to allow the player to select a game available on the gaming unit **20**. The gaming unit **20** may detect an input at block **204** in various ways. For example, the gaming unit **20** could detect if the player presses any button on the gaming unit **20**; the gaming unit **20** could determine if the player deposited one or more coins into the gaming unit **20**; the gaming unit **20** could determine if player deposited paper currency into the gaming unit **20**; etc.

[0050] The game-selection display generated at block **206** may include, for example, a list of video games that may be played on the gaming unit **20** and/or a visual message to prompt the player to deposit value into the gaming unit **20**. While the game-selection display is generated, the gaming unit **20** may wait for the player to make a game selection. Upon selection of one of the games by the player as determined at block **208**, the controller **100** may cause one of a number of game routines to be performed to allow the selected game to be played. For example, the game routines could include a video poker routine **210**, a video blackjack routine **220**, a slots routine **230**, a video keno routine **240**, and a video bingo routine **250**. At block **208**, if no game selection is made within a given period of time, the operation may branch back to block **202**.

[0051] After one of the game routines **210, 220, 230, 240, 250** has been performed to allow the player to play one of the games, block **260** may be utilized to determine whether the player wishes to terminate play on the gaming unit **20** or to select another game. If the player wishes to stop playing the gaming unit **20**, which wish may be expressed, for example, by selecting a "Cash Out" button, the controller **100** may dispense value to the player at block **262** based on the outcome of the game(s) played by the player. The operation may then return to block **202**. If the player did not wish to quit as determined at block **260**, the routine may return to block **208** where the game-selection display may again be generated to allow the player to select another game.

[0052] It should be noted that although five gaming routines are shown in **FIG. 4, a** different number of routines could be included to allow play of a different number of games. The gaming unit **20** may also be programmed to allow play of different games.

[0053] **FIG. 5** is a flowchart of an alternative main operating routine **300** that may be stored in the memory of the controller **100**. The main routine **300** may be utilized for

gaming units **20** that are designed to allow play of only a single game or single type of game. Referring to **FIG. 5**, the main routine **300** may begin operation at block **302** during which an attraction sequence may be performed in an attempt to induce a potential player in a casino to play the gaming unit **20**. The attraction sequence may be performed by displaying one or more video images on the display unit **70** and/or causing one or more sound segments, such as voice or music, to be generated via the speakers **62**.

[**0054**] During performance of the attraction sequence, if a potential player makes any input to the gaming unit **20** as determined at block **304**, the attraction sequence may be terminated and a game display may be generated on the display unit **70** at block **306**. The game display generated at block **306** may include, for example, an image of the casino game that may be played on the gaming unit **20** and/or a visual message to prompt the player to deposit value into the gaming unit **20**. At block **308**, the gaming unit **20** may determine if the player requested information concerning the game, in which case the requested information may be displayed at block **310**. Block **312** may be used to determine if the player requested initiation of a game, in which case a game routine **320** may be performed. The game routine **320** could be any one of the game routines disclosed herein, such as one of the five game routines **210**, **220**, **230**, **240**, **250**, or another game routine.

[**0055**] After the routine **320** has been performed to allow the player to play the game, block **322** may be utilized to determine whether the player wishes to terminate play on the gaming unit **20**. If the player wishes to stop playing the gaming unit **20**, which wish may be expressed, for example, by selecting a "Cash Out" button, the controller **100** may dispense value to the player at block **324** based on the outcome of the game(s) played by the player. The operation may then return to block **302**. If the player did not wish to quit as determined at block **322**, the operation may return to block **308**.

VIDEO POKER

[**0056**] **FIG. 6** is an exemplary display **350** that may be shown on the display unit **70** during performance of the video poker routine **210** shown schematically in **FIG. 4**. Referring to **FIG. 6**, the display **350** may include video images **352** of a plurality of playing cards representing the player's hand, such as five cards. To allow the player to control the play of the video poker game, a plurality of player-selectable buttons may be displayed. The buttons may include a "Hold" button **354** disposed directly below each of the playing card images **352**, a "Cash Out" button **356**, a "See Pays" button **358**, a "Bet One Credit" button **360**, a "Bet Max Credits" button **362**, and a "Deal/Draw" button **364**. The display **350** may also include an area **366** in which the number of remaining credits or value is displayed. If the display unit **70** is provided with a touch-sensitive screen, the buttons **354**, **356**, **358**, **360**, **362**, **364** may form part of the video display **350**. Alternatively, one or more of those buttons may be provided as part of a control panel that is provided separately from the display unit **70**.

[**0057**] **FIG. 8** is a flowchart of the video poker routine **210** shown schematically in **FIG. 4**. Referring to **FIG. 8**, at block **370**, the routine may determine whether the player has requested payout information, such as by activating the "See Pays" button **358**, in which case at block **372** the routine may cause one or more pay tables to be displayed on the display unit **70**. At block **374**, the routine may determine whether the player has made a bet, such as by pressing the "Bet One Credit" button **360**, in which case at block **376** bet data corresponding to the bet made by the player may be stored in the memory of the controller **100** and may also be communicated to one or more of the network computers **22**, **32** and/or to the other gaming units **20**, **30**, for example, in order to communicate an amount of a progressive shared Jackpot. At block **378**, the routine may determine whether the player has pressed the "Bet Max Credits" button **362**, in which case at block **380** bet data corresponding to the maximum allowable bet may be stored in the memory of the controller **100** and may also be communicated to one or more of the network computers **22**, **32** and/or to the other gaming units **20**, **30**, for example, in order to communicate an amount of a progressive shared jackpot.

[**0058**] At block **382**, the routine may determine if the player desires a new hand to be dealt, which may be determined by detecting if the "Deal/Draw" button **364** was activated after a wager was made. In that case, at block **384** a video poker hand may be "dealt" by causing the display unit **70** to generate the playing card images **352**. After the hand is dealt, at block **386** the routine may determine if any of the "Hold" buttons **354** have been activated by the player, in which case data regarding which of the playing card images **352** are to be "held" may be stored in the controller **100** at block **388**. If the "Deal/Draw" button **364** is activated again as determined at block **390**, each of the playing card images **352** that was not "held" may be caused to disappear from the video display **350** and to be replaced by a new, randomly selected, playing card image **352** at block **392**.

[**0059**] At block **394**, the routine may determine whether the poker hand represented by the playing card images **352** currently displayed is a winner. That determination may be made by comparing data representing the currently displayed poker hand with data representing all possible winning hands, which may be stored in the memory of the controller **100**. If there is a winning hand, a payout value corresponding to the winning hand may be determined at block **396**. At block **398**, the player's cumulative value or number of credits may be updated by subtracting the bet made by the player and adding, if the hand was a winner, the payout value determined at block **396**. The cumulative value or number of credits may also be displayed in the display area **366** (**FIG. 6**).

[**0060**] Although the video poker routine **210** is described above in connection with a single poker hand of five cards, the routine **210** may be modified to allow other versions of poker to be played. For example, seven card poker may be played, or stud poker may be played. Alternatively, multiple poker hands may be simultaneously played. In that case, the game may begin by dealing a single poker hand, and the player may be allowed to hold certain cards. After deciding which cards to hold, the held cards may be duplicated in a plurality of different poker hands, with the remaining cards for each of those poker hands being randomly determined.

VIDEO BLACKJACK

[**0061**] **FIG. 7** is an exemplary display **400** that may be shown on the display unit **70** during performance of the

video blackjack routine **220** shown schematically in **FIG. 4**. Referring to **FIG. 7**, the display **400** may include video images **402** of a pair of playing cards representing a dealer's hand, with one of the cards shown face up and the other card being shown face down, and video images **404** of a pair of playing cards representing a player's hand, with both the cards shown face up. The "dealer" may be the gaming unit **20**.

[**0062**] To allow the player to control the play of the video blackjack game, a plurality of player-selectable buttons may be displayed. The buttons may include a "Cash Out" button **406**, a "See Pays" button **408**, a "Stay" button **410**, a "Hit" button **412**, a "Bet One Credit" button **414**, and a "Bet Max Credits" button **416**. The display **400** may also include an area **418** in which the number of remaining credits or value is displayed. If the display unit **70** is provided with a touch-sensitive screen, the buttons **406**, **408**, **410**, **412**, **414**, **416** may form part of the video display **400**. Alternatively, one or more of those buttons may be provided as part of a control panel that is provided separately from the display unit **70**.

[**0063**] **FIG. 9** is a flowchart of the video blackjack routine **220** shown schematically in **FIG. 4**. Referring to **FIG. 9**, the video blackjack routine **220** may begin at block **420** where it may determine whether a bet has been made by the player. That may be determined, for example, by detecting the activation of either the "Bet One Credit" button **414** or the "Bet Max Credits" button **416**. At block **422**, bet data corresponding to the bet made at block **420** may be stored in the memory of the controller **100** and may also be communicated to one or more of the network computers **22**, **32** and/or to the other gaming units **20**, **30**, for example, in order to communicate an amount of a progressive shared jackpot. At block **424**, a dealer's hand and a player's hand may be "dealt" by making the playing card images **402**, **404** appear on the display unit **70**.

[**0064**] At block **426**, the player may be allowed to be "hit," in which case at block **428** another card will be dealt to the player's hand by making another playing card image **404** appear in the display **400**. If the player is hit, block **430** may determine if the player has "bust," or exceeded 21. If the player has not bust, blocks **426** and **428** may be performed again to allow the player to be hit again.

[**0065**] If the player decides not to hit, at block **432** the routine may determine whether the dealer should be hit. Whether the dealer hits may be determined in accordance with predetermined rules, such as the dealer always hit if the dealer's hand totals 15 or less. If the dealer hits, at block **434** the dealer's hand may be dealt another card by making another playing card image **402** appear in the display **400**. At block **436** the routine may determine whether the dealer has bust. If the dealer has not bust, blocks **432**, **434** may be performed again to allow the dealer to be hit again.

[**0066**] If the dealer does not hit, at block **436** the outcome of the blackjack game and a corresponding payout may be determined based on, for example, whether the player or the dealer has the higher hand that does not exceed 21. If the player has a winning hand, a payout value corresponding to the winning hand may be determined at block **440**. At block **442**, the player's cumulative value or number of credits may be updated by subtracting the bet made by the player and adding, if the player won, the payout value determined at block **440**. The cumulative value or number of credits may also be displayed in the display area **418** (**FIG. 7**).

SLOTS

[**0067**] **FIG. 10** is an exemplary display **450** that may be shown on the display unit **70** during performance of the slots routine **230** shown schematically in **FIG. 4**. Referring to **FIG. 10**, the display **450** may include video images **452** of a plurality of slot machine reels, each of the reels having a plurality of reel symbols **454** associated therewith. Although the display **450** shows five reel images **452**, each of which may have three reel symbols **454** that are visible at a time, other reel configurations could be utilized.

[**0068**] To allow the player to control the play of the slots game, a plurality of player-selectable buttons may be displayed. The buttons may include a "Cash Out" button **456**, a "See Pays" button **458**, a plurality of payline-selection buttons **460** each of which allows the player to select a different number of paylines prior to "spinning" the reels, a plurality of bet-selection buttons **462** each of which allows a player to specify a wager amount for each payline selected, a "Spin" button **464**, and a "Max Bet" button **466** to allow a player to make the maximum wager allowable.

[**0069**] **FIG. 12** is a flowchart of the slots routine **230** shown schematically in **FIG. 10**. Referring to **FIG. 12**, at block **470**, the routine may determine whether the player has requested payout information, such as by activating the "See Pays" button **458**, in which case at block **472** the routine may cause one or more pay tables to be displayed on the display unit **70**. At block **474**, the routine may determine whether the player has pressed one of the payline-selection buttons **460**, in which case at block **476** data corresponding to the number of paylines selected by the player may be stored in the memory of the controller **100**. At block **478**, the routine may determine whether the player has pressed one of the bet-selection buttons **462**, in which case at block **480** data corresponding to the amount bet per payline may be stored in the memory of the controller **100** and may also be communicated to one or more of the network computers **22**, **32** and/or to the other gaming units **20**, **30**, for example, in order to communicate an amount of a progressive shared jackpot. At block **482**, the routine may determine whether the player has pressed the "Max Bet" button **466**, in which case at block **484** bet data (which may include both payline data and bet-per-payline data) corresponding to the maximum allowable bet may be stored in the memory of the controller **100** and may also be communicated to one or more of the network computers **22**, **32** and/or to the other gaming units **20**, **30**, for example, in order to communicate an amount of a progressive shared jackpot.

[**0070**] If the "Spin" button **464** has been activated by the player as determined at block **486**, at block **488** the routine may cause the slot machine reel images **452** to begin "spinning" so as to simulate the appearance of a plurality of spinning mechanical slot machine reels. At block **490**, the routine may determine the positions at which the slot machine reel images will stop, or the particular symbol images **454** that will be displayed when the reel images **452** stop spinning. At block **492**, the routine may stop the reel images **452** from spinning by displaying stationary reel images **452** and images of three symbols **454** for each stopped reel image **452**. The virtual reels may be stopped

from left to right, from the perspective of the player, or in any other manner or sequence.

[0071] The routine may provide for the possibility of a bonus game or round if certain conditions are met, such as the display in the stopped reel images **452** of a particular symbol **454**. If there is such a bonus condition as determined at block **494**, the routine may proceed to block **496** where a bonus round may be played. The bonus round may be a different game than slots, and many other types of bonus games could be provided. If the player wins the bonus round, or receives additional credits or points in the bonus round, a bonus value may be determined at block **498**. A payout value corresponding to outcome of the slots game and/or the bonus round may be determined at block **500**. At block **502**, the player's cumulative value or number of credits may be updated by subtracting the bet made by the player and adding, if the slot game and/or bonus round was a winner, the payout value determined at block **500**.

[0072] Although the above routine has been described as a virtual slot machine routine in which slot machine reels are represented as images on the display unit **70**, actual slot machine reels that are capable of being spun may be utilized instead.

VIDEO KENO

[0073] **FIG. 11** is an exemplary display **520** that may be shown on the display unit **70** during performance of the video keno routine **240** shown schematically in **FIG. 4**. Referring to **FIG. 11**, the display **520** may include a video image **522** of a plurality of numbers that were selected by the player prior to the start of a keno game and a video image **524** of a plurality of numbers randomly selected during the keno game. The randomly selected numbers may be displayed in a grid pattern.

[0074] To allow the player to control the play of the keno game, a plurality of player-selectable buttons may be displayed. The buttons may include a "Cash Out" button **526**, a "See Pays" button **528**, a "Bet One Credit" button **530**, a "Bet Max Credits" button **532**, a "Select Ticket" button **534**, a "Select Number" button **536**, and a "Play" button **538**. The display **520** may also include an area **540** in which the number of remaining credits or value is displayed. If the display unit **70** is provided with a touch-sensitive screen, the buttons may form part of the video display **520**. Alternatively, one or more of those buttons may be provided as part of a control panel that is provided separately from the display unit **70**.

[0075] **FIG. 13** is a flowchart of the video keno routine **240** shown schematically in **FIG. 4**. The keno routine **240** may be utilized in connection with a single gaming unit **20** where a single player is playing a keno game, or the keno routine **240** may be utilized in connection with multiple gaming units **20** where multiple players are playing a single keno game. In the latter case, one or more of the acts described below may be performed either by the controller **100** in each gaming unit or by one of the network computer **22**, **32** to which multiple gaming units **20** are operatively connected.

[0076] Referring to **FIG. 13**, at block **550**, the routine may determine whether the player has requested payout information, such as by activating the "See Pays" button **528**, in which case at block **552** the routine may cause one or more pay tables to be displayed on the display unit **70**. At block **554**, the routine may determine whether the player has made a bet, such as by having pressed the "Bet One Credit" button **530** or the "Bet Max Credits" button **532**, in which case at block **556** bet data corresponding to the bet made by the player may be stored in the memory of the controller **100** and may also be communicated to one or more of the network computers **22**, **32** and/or to the other gaming units **20**, **30**, for example, in order to communicate an amount of a progressive shared jackpot. After the player has made a wager, at block **558** the player may select a keno ticket, and at block **560** the ticket may be displayed on the display **520**. At block **562**, the player may select one or more game numbers, which may be within a range set by the casino. After being selected, the player's game numbers may be stored in the memory of the controller **100** at block **564** and may be included in the image **522** on the display **520** at block **566**. After a certain amount of time, the keno game may be closed to additional players (where a number of players are playing a single keno game using multiple gaming units **20**).

[0077] If play of the keno game is to begin as determined at block **568**, at block **570** a game number within a range set by the casino may be randomly selected either by the controller **100** or a central computer operatively connected to the controller, such as one of the network computers **22**, **32**. At block **572**, the randomly selected game number may be displayed on the display unit **70** and the display units **70** of other gaming units **20** (if any) which are involved in the same keno game. At block **574**, the controller **100** (or the central computer noted above) may increment a count which keeps track of how many game numbers have been selected at block **570**.

[0078] At block **576**, the controller **100** (or one of the network computers **22**, **32**) may determine whether a maximum number of game numbers within the range have been randomly selected. If not, another game number may be randomly selected at block **570**. If the maximum number of game numbers has been selected, at block **578** the controller **100** (or a central computer) may determine whether there are a sufficient number of matches between the game numbers selected by the player and the game numbers selected at block **570** to cause the player to win. The number of matches may depend on how many numbers the player selected and the particular keno rules being used.

[0079] If there are a sufficient number of matches, a payout may be determined at block **580** to compensate the player for winning the game. The payout may depend on the number of matches between the game numbers selected by the player and the game numbers randomly selected at block **570**. At block **582**, the player's cumulative value or number of credits may be updated by subtracting the bet made by the player and adding, if the keno game was won, the payout value determined at block **580**. The cumulative value or number of credits may also be displayed in the display area **540** (**FIG. 11**).

VIDEO BINGO

[0080] **FIG. 14** is an exemplary display **600** that may be shown on the display unit **70** during performance of the video bingo routine **250** shown schematically in **FIG. 4**. Referring to **FIG. 14**, the display **600** may include one or

more video images **602** of a bingo card and images of the bingo numbers selected during the game. The bingo card images **602** may have a grid pattern.

[**0081**] To allow the player to control the play of the bingo game, a plurality of player-selectable buttons may be displayed. The buttons may include a "Cash Out" button **604**, a "See Pays" button **606**, a "Bet One Credit" button **608**, a "Bet Max Credits" button **610**, a "Select Card" button **612**, and a "Play" button **614**. The display **600** may also include an area **616** in which the number of remaining credits or value is displayed. If the display unit **70** is provided with a touch-sensitive screen, the buttons may form part of the video display **600**. Alternatively, one or more of those buttons may be provided as part of a control panel that is provided separately from the display unit **70**.

[**0082**] **FIG. 15** is a flowchart of the video bingo routine **250** shown schematically in **FIG. 4**. The bingo routine **250** may be utilized in connection with a single gaming unit **20** where a single player is playing a bingo game, or the bingo routine **250** may be utilized in connection with multiple gaming units **20** where multiple players are playing a single bingo game. In the latter case, one or more of the acts described below may be performed either by the controller **100** in each gaming unit **20** or by one of the network computers **22**, **32** to which multiple gaming units **20** are operatively connected. Referring to **FIG. 15**, at block **620**, the routine may determine whether the player has requested payout information, such as by activating the "See Pays" button **606**, in which case at block **622** the routine may cause one or more pay tables to be displayed on the display unit **70**. At block **624**, the routine may determine whether the player has made a bet, such as by having pressed the "Bet One Credit" button **608** or the "Bet Max Credits" button **610**, in which case at block **626** bet data corresponding to the bet made by the player may be stored in the memory of the controller **100** and may also be communicated to one or more of the network computers **22**, **32** and/or to the other gaming units **20**, **30**, for example, in order to communicate an amount of a progressive shared jackpot.

[**0083**] After the player has made a wager, at block **628** the player may select a bingo card, which may be generated randomly. The player may select more than one bingo card, and there may be a maximum number of bingo cards that a player may select. After play is to commence as determined at block **632**, at block **634** a bingo number may be randomly generated by the controller **100** or a central computer such as one of the network computers **22**, **32**. At block **636**, the bingo number may be displayed on the display unit **70** and the display units **70** of any other gaming units **20** involved in the bingo game.

[**0084**] At block **638**, the controller **100** (or a central computer) may determine whether any player has won the bingo game. If no player has won, another bingo number may be randomly selected at block **634**. If any player has bingo as determined at block **638**, the routine may determine at block **640** whether the player playing that gaming unit **20** was the winner. If so, at block **642** a payout for the player may be determined. The payout may depend on the number of random numbers that were drawn before there was a winner, the total number of winners (if there was more than one player), and the amount of money that was wagered on the game. At block **644**, the player's cumulative value or number of credits may be updated by subtracting the bet made by the player and adding, if the bingo game was won, the payout value determined at block **642**. The cumulative value or number of credits may also be displayed in the display area **616** (**FIG. 14**).

DISTRIBUTED JACKPOT ROUTINES

[**0085**] **FIG. 16** is a flow chart that depicts steps that may be taken to establish a winner's jackpot and a distributed jackpot. The distributed jackpot provides the capability to coordinate payouts on a group of gaming units such that when one player on one of the gaming units in the group wins an award everyone else that is playing on other gaming units in the group shares a percentage of the award. At block **646**, an amount wagered by a player at one of the gaming units **20**, **30** may be determined by the controller **100**. The amount wagered, a fraction of the wager to be allocated to the winner's jackpot (e.g., 95% of the amount wagered), and a fraction of the wager to be allocated to the distributed jackpot (e.g., 5% of the amount wagered), may then be calculated by the controller **100** and communicated to the network computer **22** by the gaming unit **20** or **30**, at block **648**. Alternatively, the network computer **22** could calculate the fraction of the wager to be allocated to the distributed jackpot. In the event that the network computer **22** is located at a separate facility from the gaming unit **20** or **30** at which the wager is made, the actual payment for the progressive jackpot amount may be sent from the facility at which the gaming unit **20** or **30** is located (e.g., at a casino) to the facility at which the network computer **22** is located (e.g., at a host company).

[**0086**] The steps of blocks **646** and **648** could be performed in any portion of the gaming routines described above. For example, the steps of blocks **646** and **648** could be performed between blocks **422** and **424** of **FIG. 9**, or before block **486** of **FIG. 12**.

[**0087**] With reference to **FIG. 17**, in the event of a winning outcome at one of the gaming units **20** or **30**, a distributed jackpot payout routine may be initiated, as indicated at block **652**. The distributed jackpot payout routine may be performed at any appropriate stage of any of the five gaming routines described above. For example, the distributed jackpot payout routine could be performed as part of block **394** of the video poker routine **210** (**FIG. 8**), as part of block **438** of the video blackjack routine **220** (**FIG. 9**), as part of block **500** of the video slots routine **230** (**FIG. 12**), as part of block **578** of the video keno routine **240** (**FIG. 13**), and/or as part of block **640** of the video bingo routine (**FIG. 15**).

[**0088**] With reference again to **FIG. 17**, at block **654**, the payout value, such as, for example, the payout value determined in block **580** (**FIG. 13**) may be compared with a threshold amount by the controller **100**. If the payout value is less than the threshold amount, no sharing of a jackpot may occur, as indicated at block **656**.

[**0089**] If the payout value equals or exceeds the threshold amount, the identity of the group of players eligible for a portion of the distributed jackpot at the time of the payout may be determined, at block **658**. For example, if all of the gaming units **20** are potentially eligible for a portion of the distributed jackpot, the network computer **22** could identify those gaming units **20** that are performing one of the game

routines **210**, **220**, **230**, **240**, or **250** (**FIG. 4**), and designate those gaming units as "in play" and therefore eligible to share in the distributed jackpot. Alternatively, each gaming unit **20** could be determined to be "in play," and therefore eligible to share in the distributed jackpot, if there are credits on the gaming unit **20** or if there is a player tracking card in the gaming unit **20**.

[**0090**] At block **660**, the value of the distributed payout to each player in the group determined to be eligible may be calculated, for example, by taking a percentage of the distributed jackpot (e.g., 5%), which may be fixed or varied (for example, as a function of time or as a function of the size of the distributed jackpot), and dividing that percentage of the distributed jackpot by the number of eligible players in the group. At block **662**, the payout of the distributed jackpot may be made to each eligible player in the group.

[**0091**] A customized presentation (that may include text messages, graphics, and/or sounds) may be displayed on each of the gaming units **20** to communicate to the players operating those gaming units **20** that a distributed jackpot payout has been made, as indicated at block **664**. The distributed jackpot and the winner's jackpot may then each be reset to a corresponding base value, as indicated at block **666**, and the process may return to block **646** (**FIG. 16**).

[**0092**] The winner's jackpot may be advertised as the payout that will occur after subtracting the distributed jackpot. If done, this may avoid confusion and/or disappointment on the part of the winner that might otherwise occur if the entire jackpot amount (the winner's jackpot plus the distributed jackpot) were advertised.

What is claimed is:

1. A gaming apparatus, comprising:

a display unit that is capable of generating video images;

a value input device;

a controller operatively coupled to said display unit and said value input device, said controller comprising a processor and a memory operatively coupled to said processor;

said controller being programmed to allow a person to make a wager;

said controller being programmed to cause a video image representing a game to be generated on said display unit, said video image representing one of the following games: video poker, video blackjack, video slots, video keno and video bingo;

said video image comprising an image of at least five playing cards if said game comprises video poker;

said video image comprising an image of a plurality of simulated slot machine reels if said game comprises video slots;

said video image comprising an image of a plurality of playing cards if said game comprises video blackjack;

said video image comprising an image of a plurality of keno numbers if said game comprises video keno;

said video image comprising an image of a bingo grid if said game comprises video bingo;

said controller being programmed to determine a value payout associated with an outcome of said game; and

said controller being further programmed to compare said value payout to a threshold amount, and to generate a distributed jackpot payout message if said value payout is greater than or equal to said threshold amount.

2. A gaming apparatus as defined in claim 1 wherein said controller is programmed to display on said display unit a winner's jackpot amount and a distributed jackpot amount.

3. A gaming apparatus as defined in claim 1 wherein said controller is programmed to generate a signal indicating whether or not said gaming apparatus is in play.

4. A gaming system comprising a plurality of gaming apparatuses as defined in claim 1, said gaming apparatuses being interconnected to form a network of gaming apparatuses.

5. A gaming system as defined in claim 4, wherein said gaming apparatuses are interconnected via the Internet.

6. A gaming apparatus, comprising:

a display unit that is capable of generating video images;

a value input device;

a controller operatively coupled to said display unit and said value input device, said controller comprising a processor and a memory operatively coupled to said processor;

said controller being programmed to allow a person to make a wager;

said controller being programmed to cause a video image to be generated on said display unit, said video image representing a game;

said controller being programmed to determine, after said video image has been displayed, a value payout associated with an outcome of said game represented by said video image, to compare said value payout to a distributed jackpot payout value, and to generate a distributed jackpot payout message if said value payout is greater than or equal to said distributed jackpot payout value.

7. A gaming apparatus as defined in claim 6 wherein said controller is programmed to display on said display unit a jackpot amount and a distributed jackpot amount.

8. A gaming system comprising a plurality of gaming apparatuses as defined in claim 6, said gaming apparatuses being interconnected to form a network of gaming apparatuses.

9. A gaming system as defined in claim 8, wherein said gaming apparatuses are interconnected via the Internet.

10. A gaming apparatus, comprising:

a display unit that is capable of generating video images;

a value input device;

a controller operatively coupled to said display unit and said value input device, said controller comprising a processor and a memory operatively coupled to said processor;

said controller being programmed to allow a person to make a wager;

said controller being programmed to allow a person to make a payline selection;

said controller being programmed to cause a video image to be generated on said display unit, said video image comprising a plurality of simulated slot machine reels of a slots game, each of said slot machine reels having a plurality of slot machine symbols;

said controller being programmed to determine a value payout associated with an outcome of said slots game, said controller being programmed to determine said outcome of said slots game based on a configuration of said slot machine symbols, to compare said value payout to a distributed jackpot payout value, and to generate a distributed jackpot payout message if said value payout is greater than or equal to said distributed jackpot payout value.

11. A gaming apparatus as defined in claim 10 wherein said controller is programmed to allow a user to select a number of paylines.

12. A gaming apparatus as defined in claim 10 wherein said controller is programmed to display on said display unit a jackpot amount and a distributed jackpot amount.

13. A gaming apparatus as defined in claim 10 wherein said controller is programmed to generate a signal indicating whether or not said gaming apparatus is in play.

14. A gaming system comprising a plurality of gaming apparatuses as defined in claim 10, said gaming apparatuses being interconnected to form a network of gaming apparatuses.

15. A gaming method comprising:

causing a video image of a game to be generated, said video image representing one of the following games: video poker, video blackjack, video slots, video keno and video bingo;

said video image comprising an image of at least five playing cards if said game comprises video poker;

said video image comprising an image of a plurality of simulated slot machine reels if said game comprises video slots;

said video image comprising an image of a plurality of playing cards if said game comprises video blackjack;

said video image comprising an image of a plurality of keno numbers if said game comprises video keno; and

said video image comprising an image of a bingo grid if said game comprises video bingo;

determining a value payout associated with an outcome of said game represented by said video image;

comparing said value payout to a distributed jackpot payout value; and

generating a distributed jackpot payout message if said value payout is greater than or equal to said distributed jackpot payout value.

16. A gaming method as defined in claim 15, additionally comprising:

displaying a distributed jackpot amount.

17. A gaming method as defined in claim 15, additionally comprising:

determining whether or not a gaming unit is in play.

18. A memory having a computer program stored therein, said computer program being capable of being used in connection with a gaming apparatus, said memory comprising:

a first memory portion physically configured in accordance with computer program instructions that would cause the gaming apparatus to allow a person to make a wager;

a second memory portion physically configured in accordance with computer program instructions that would cause the gaming apparatus to cause a video image representing a game to be generated on a display unit, said video image representing one of the following games: video poker, video blackjack, video slots, video keno and video bingo;

said video image comprising an image of at least five playing cards if said game comprises video poker;

said video image comprising an image of a plurality of simulated slot machine reels if said game comprises video slots,

said video image comprising an image of a plurality of playing cards if said game comprises video blackjack;

said video image comprising an image of a plurality of keno numbers if said game comprises video keno;

said video image comprising an image of a bingo grid if said game comprises video bingo; and

a third memory portion physically configured in accordance with computer program instructions that would cause the gaming apparatus to determine a value payout associated with an outcome of said game represented by said video image, to compare said value payout to a distributed jackpot payout value, and to generate a distributed jackpot payout message if said value payout is greater than or equal to said distributed jackpot payout value.

19. A memory as defined in claim 18 wherein said memory additionally comprises a fourth portion physically configured in accordance with computer program instructions that would cause the gaming apparatus to display a distributed jackpot amount.

20. A memory as defined in claim 18 wherein said memory additionally comprises a fourth portion physically configured in accordance with computer program instructions that would cause the gaming apparatus to determine whether or not said gaming apparatus is in play.

21. A method of operating a gaming system having a plurality of gaming units, comprising:

providing a plurality of electronically linked gaming units;

causing a video image of a game to be generated;

determining a value payout associated with an outcome of said game represented by said video image;

comparing said value payout to a distributed jackpot payout value; and

paying a portion of a distributed jackpot to at least one of said electronically linked gaming units, regardless of whether a winning outcome was achieved on said at least one of said electronically linked gaming units.

22. A gaming method as defined in claim 21, additionally comprising:

displaying a distributed jackpot amount on each of said electronically linked gaming units.

23. A gaming method as defined in claim 21, additionally comprising:

determining whether or not a gaming unit is in play.

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